

where there is free and valid consent of both parties. A forced marriage is where there is any duress, whether physical or mental, to marry without the free and valid consent of one or both parties. Duress can involve anything from emotional and social pressures, to assaults, threatening behaviour, imprisonment, abduction and in a few extreme cases, suicide and murder. Abduction can involve deceiving or forcing a woman or girl to go abroad, such as to the Indian Sub-Continent, and subject them to forced marriage and other abuses once they arrive. Most cases involve subtle social and emotional pressures to marry against your will.

Restrictions on lifestyle is controlling behaviour by the abuser, such as parents, husbands, in-laws and other family members, which seeks to impose social isolation, imprisonment and limitations on freedom to socialise or associate with others, form sexual relationships, exercise the right to choose dress and deny educational or career opportunities. Forced marriage and restrictions on lifestyle are imposed on Asian and other minority women because of the need to control female sexuality and preserve family honour.

Dowry-related Abuse

In some cases, brides are subject to domestic violence and harassment by their husbands and in-laws in order to demand a dowry or more dowry after the wedding.

A dowry can include demands for money, jewellery, land and property and other goods, such as cars. In the Indian Sub-Continent, there is a high rate of "dowry deaths", often by burning, where a woman is killed because she has insufficient dowry. In the UK, although dowry demands may be a factor in some deaths, these demands are more linked with violence and harassment of wives and daughter-in-law.

Suicide and Self-harm

Most women experiencing domestic violence suffer from depression and trauma. However, research has shown that Asian women are 2-3 times more likely to commit suicide than women in the general population.

They are also more likely to contemplate or attempt suicide. Self-harm can also include self-mutilation and eating disorders. The reasons are often to do with abusive and oppressive practices in the family. Because of obstacles inside and outside the community which prevent women from leaving abusive situations, some women feel they have no option but to kill or harm themselves.

The solution, however, is not suicide or self-harm, but seeking help to escape from domestic violence.

A Woman in Despair

I fell in love with a British Asian while he was on holiday in Kenya. When I arrived in Leicester I discovered he was not the man he seemed. He constantly complained that I had not brought enough dowry. All he wanted was for me to go out and earn money. At the same time he was obsessively jealous. He did not want me to speak to anybody else. Almost overnight a vibrant young woman had become virtually a prisoner and domestic servant.

He thought nothing of having a stream of affairs however. Meanwhile he beat me up so badly that I was unable to carry my child because of a ruined back. The last straw was when he infected me with a sexual disease. Luckily I found help at a local women's project.

I am now rebuilding my life, emotionally - surviving with two young children on benefits, waiting until they are old enough so that I can go out to work. My former husband does not contribute a penny towards the children's maintenance. And I am unable to go back to Kenya because in the eyes of my community, I am a shamed woman who was sexually abused from childhood by my own family and forced to run away at sixteen. Alone and vulnerable, I fell in love and married an older man and the horror began. Over a four year period he beat me mercilessly while still forcing me to have a second child.

I was lucky. My local council found me accommodation and I was able to leave him. I also found counselling which helped me come to terms with years of abuse.

Today I present my own show on a community radio station and help people from my community to develop their confidence, skills and talent. My daughter is top of her class, and what is more, has learned to care about other people. On the plane to England I heard from my father-in-law for the first time that my husband has been married several times before.

I bring some 35 000 rupees and a little gold - all my family can afford after years of saving and scrimping. It's simply not enough to buy the slightest bit of kindness. Even though I cannot speak English, and know nothing of England, I am forced to go out to find work. But I am beaten with a stick because it is not cash in hand. In fact I am beaten by everybody in this callous and disgraceful family. Disowned by my own family in India because of the shame of a broken marriage, I now face deportation.