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# The demographics of forced marriage of people with learning disabilities: findings from a national database

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** To compare the UK demographics of forced marriage of people with learning disabilities and people without learning disabilities in order to inform effective safeguarding practice.

**Design:** An analysis of all cases of forced marriage reported to the UK Government's Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) between 2009 and 2015.

**Findings:** People with learning disabilities are at five times greater risk of forced marriage than people without learning disabilities. Men and women with learning disabilities are equally likely to be forced to marry, whereas amongst the general population women are more likely than men to be forced to marry. Patterns of ethnicity, geographic location within the UK and reporters are the same for people with and without learning disabilities.

**Research limitations:** The analysis is based on cases reported to the FMU, and for some cases the data held was incomplete. More importantly, many cases go unreported and so the FMU data does not necessarily reflect all cases of forced marriage in the UK.

**Practical implications:** Forced marriage of people with learning disabilities is a safeguarding issue. Practitioners across health, education, criminal justice and social care need to better understand the risk of forced marriage for people with learning disabilities. Links to practice resources developed as part of the wider project are provided.

**Originality:** This is the first time that researchers have been given access to FMU data and the first time that a statistical analysis of cases of forced marriage involving someone with a learning disability have been analysed.

## Introduction

Forced marriage is a safeguarding issue which may affect people of any age, sex, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, country of origin or (dis)ability. However, as with other safeguarding issues, some people may be at heightened risk. It is important to understand variations in risk of forced marriage at both an individual and population level, so that safeguarding resources and staff training can be appropriately targeted. The true extent of forced marriage in the UK and elsewhere is not – and perhaps cannot be – known with any degree of certainty. A number of studies of forced marriage have been undertaken in the UK (see Chantler, 2012, for an overview of 6 studies) but, in the UK and elsewhere, little is known about forced marriage of people with learning disabilities. However, it is known that people with learning disabilities are at risk of forced marriage; that very real differences exist between victims with and without learning disabilities and the ways they are (or are not) protected from harm; and that practitioners across a range of professional groups find it challenging to both recognise and respond adequately to forced marriage of this group (Clawson 2016; McCarthy et al, under review).

In 2005 the UK-wide Forced Marriage Unit (FMU), jointly overseen by the Home Office and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, was established to prevent the forced marriage of UK citizens, both in the UK and worldwide. It does this through outreach and educational activities, through providing advice to those who have been forced to marry or may be at risk of forced marriage, and through intervening in individual cases. Individual casework can include working with other local, national and international government agencies in order to prevent forced marriages from taking place and/or to safeguard victims where forced marriages have already occurred. In the UK, casework can involve the FMU offering advice; helping to find the victim a safe place to stay; helping to stop a UK visa if the victim has been forced to sponsor someone; and helping to apply to the court for a *Forced Marriage Protection Order*. The FMU also collates annual statistics on the cases of forced marriage that are reported via its helpline (Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Home Office, 2018a). This paper uses FMU data to explore forced marriage of people with learning disabilities in order to improve safeguarding responses.

### ***Forced marriage and the law***

The UK Government defines forced marriage as occurring when *‘one or both people do not (or in cases of people with learning disabilities or reduced capacity, cannot) consent to the marriage’*

(Home Office, 2018). Forced marriage is different to arranged marriage where the family takes the lead in choosing a potential spouse but both parties have the right to refuse a potential match. As the definition suggests, people who lack the capacity to consent to marry may be particularly vulnerable to forced marriage; this includes people with learning disabilities. The Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 makes it clear that:

*'In relation to a victim who lacks capacity to consent to marriage, the offence [of forcing someone to marry] is capable of being committed by any conduct carried out for the purpose of causing the victim to enter into a marriage (whether or not the conduct amounts to violence, threats or any other form of coercion).'* (ibid, s.121)

This means that 'force', duress or coercion are not needed for a marriage to be considered a forced marriage: all that is needed is for one (or both) parties to be unable to lawfully consent to the marriage because of mental incapacity. Moreover, because the decision to marry is not a decision that can ever be made on behalf of another person (see Mental Capacity Act 2005, s.27: excluded decisions) this means that some people with learning disabilities may be unable to marry. Forcing someone to marry is an offence regardless of whether the marriage takes place in the UK or elsewhere and regardless of whether the ceremony is civil, religious or designated as marriage by custom. The offence of forcing someone to marry is punishable by up to seven years in prison and an unlimited fine.

Previous research funded by the FMU (Clawson, 2011; Clawson & Fyson, 2017), based on a survey of practitioners who had worked with victims of forced marriage, suggested that the demographics of forced marriage of people with learning disabilities were different from those of people without learning disabilities. As a consequence, from 2009 onwards the FMU introduced 'disability' as a new item of data on which it would collect information whenever an actual or attempted forced marriage was reported.

*Table 1: Disability and forced marriage in the UK*

As can be seen, FMU data shows that from 2010 – 2014 the percentage of reported cases of forced marriage involving a person with learning disabilities rose fairly steadily, and since then have remained broadly static. This is likely to be attributable to improved recording practices within the

FMU and the publication in 2010 of the UK's first practice guidelines on forced marriage and learning disability (HM Government, 2010).

As part of a wider study of forced marriage involving people with learning disabilities in the UK, this paper reports an analysis of cases of forced marriage reported to the FMU as involving at least one person with a learning disability. The particular focus of the analysis is to compare characteristics of cases of forced marriage between victims with and without learning disabilities. The FMU holds data on every case of actual or attempted forced marriage that is reported to them. Although these cases do not capture every case of forced marriage in the UK, the FMU database is the only national dataset on forced marriage available in any country worldwide. An analysis of this data therefore affords an unrivalled opportunity to learn more about the demographics of forced marriage of people with learning disabilities. This is the first time that the FMU data has been interrogated by external researchers. The data presented in this paper provides new insights into how risk factors for forced marriage amongst people with learning disabilities are both similar to and different from risk factors amongst the general population. It is hoped that the findings can inform the development of more effective adult safeguarding practices, both in the UK and internationally.

## **Methodology**

This work forms one part of a larger project which sought to better understand forced marriage of people with learning disabilities from a range of stakeholder perspectives and thus improve safeguarding policy and practice (see <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/groups/mymarriagemychoice/> for further details).

A caseworker from the FMU extracted information on all cases (where disability was recorded as present) reported between 2009, when recording of disability was introduced, and 2015, the most recent full year for which data was available. The data extraction took place in late summer 2016. Data was extracted from case notes by applying a standard framework to each case, in order to enable the drawing out of basic demographic information (age, sex, type of disability), geographic details and information about who had reported the case. The resultant quantitative data was analysed to provide descriptive statistics of each phenomena. In some categories there were significant amounts of missing data which limited the analysis; unless otherwise stated, missing data was excluded from calculations.

Some, but not all, cases also included additional information in the form of case notes. The presence or absence of such notes was recorded and, where notes were present, key issues were noted. There was insufficient qualitative data to undertake a thematic analysis, but a summary of how the nature and quality of notes developed over time is provided in table 2.

Finally, it should also be noted that 'cases of forced marriage' includes all cases reported to the FMU, whether of forced marriages that took place or where forced marriage was attempted. Although these caveats mean that the data must be approached with caution, it nevertheless provides a unique opportunity to understand more about the demographics of UK forced marriage of people with learning disabilities.

### ***Ethics***

Ethical approval was sought and obtained (Research Register for Social Care ID no. 16/IEC08/0014) from the Social Care Research Ethics Committee for England (NHS, undated). The extraction of data was undertaken by FMU staff; no information which might have enabled the identification of specific individuals was shared with researchers. Owing to the sensitivity of the data and the imperative of maintaining confidentiality, researchers were not granted direct access to any case files. Rather, they were provided with a set of data that had been extracted from the FMU's case files and anonymised.

### **Findings**

The FMU data included a total of 593 cases where a disability was identified, of which 554 cases (93%) related to someone with a learning disability and the remaining 39 (7%) related to physical or sensory impairment. The analysis which follows relates to the 554 cases that involved someone with a learning disability. Information collected by the FMU has allowed for quantitative analysis of three main factors: personal characteristics (age, sex, disability); geographies (within UK and internationally); and who is reporting cases of forced marriage. Each of these factors will be examined in turn but consideration will first be given to the qualitative data.

Each case of actual, attempted or planned forced marriage reported to the FMU is allocated a unique case file number. At the point when a case is reported via the national forced marriage helpline (020 7008 0151), the FMU ask for a range of data from the person who contacts them.

Depending on who is reporting the forced marriage, the volume and quality of information which the FMU is able to collect will vary. There have also been improvements over time in the way in which the FMU collects data and in the amount of detail recorded in case files.

*Table 2: Development of information within FMU case notes*

Table 2 shows how FMU recording of cases changed and developed during the years 2009-2015. Over time, the data shows an increased understanding and awareness amongst FMU staff of the relevance of learning disability. It also demonstrates the increasing links made between FMU and other relevant Government agencies, including both local authority safeguarding teams and immigration authorities (UK Border Agency/ UK Visa and Immigration), in seeking to prevent forced marriages from taking place. With the increased overall number of cases involving people with learning disabilities, came more detailed additional notes. During the latter years (2013-2015) a caseworker was assigned specifically to advise on cases involving people with learning disabilities, which has led to increasing expertise about what information is needed to inform safeguarding action. The creation of this role in the FMU has been beneficial in terms of raising awareness of the issues relating to people with learning disabilities, both internally and externally.

The qualitative data from case file notes provided insights into individual experience and context for the numerical data, bringing to life the trauma which some people with learning disabilities experience in the context of forced marriage. Incidents reported within case files included physical and psychological abuse; rape and pregnancy (including the use of pregnancy as a means of bolstering visa applications); honour-based violence; and female genital mutilation. Although not all forced marriages of people with learning disabilities involve these types of trauma, many do.

## **The intersections of disability, age and sex in forced marriage of people with learning disabilities**

### ***Disability***

As noted earlier, the vast majority (93%) of cases reported to involve a person with disability involved a person with learning disability rather than any other disability or impairment. Table 1 showed that, as reporting and recording of cases has improved, the proportion of all reported cases



of forced marriage known to involve someone with a disability has stabilised at an annual rate of around 10.5%. Given that 93% of recorded disabilities are learning disability, this suggest that around 10% of all cases of forced marriages of UK citizens involve a person with learning disability.

The significance of this figure lies in its relation to the prevalence of learning disability within the general UK population, as this evidences the increased vulnerability to forced marriage amongst people with learning disabilities. UK-wide prevalence figures for learning disability are not available. This is because Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales only publish data about the number of people with learning disabilities who are known to be using specialist support services, rather than the overall number of people with learning disabilities (Northern Ireland Department of Health, 2017; Scottish Commission for Learning Disability, 2018; Statistics for Wales, 2018). In England, Public Health England (2016) estimates that around 2% of the adult population has a learning disability, though fewer receive support from adult social care services. Whilst the proportion of people with learning disabilities who have access to adult social care may vary owing to variations in funding and threshold criteria, it is unlikely that the prevalence of learning disabilities in the overall population differs widely across the UK. If anything, the prevalence of learning disability is likely to be higher in England than in other countries of the UK. This is because England is more urbanised and densely populated (Statista, 2019) and, although severe learning disabilities are distributed evenly amongst the population, mild learning disabilities are more prevalent in deprived urban areas (Department of Health, 2001).

Comparing the population-level prevalence of learning disabilities (circa. 2%) to the prevalence of learning disability within the FMU forced marriage statistics (circa. 10%) leads to the conclusion that people with learning disabilities face a five times greater risk of being forced to marry in comparison to people without learning disabilities.

### ***Age***

Table 3 shows the distribution of cases of forced marriage of people with learning disabilities 2010-2015 by age of victim; the youngest victim was aged just 12 and the oldest was 85. As can be seen, age was only consistently recorded in 2014 and 2015 and so, given the high proportion of missing data in earlier years, only these two years can be considered to provide reliable data on age distribution.

*Table 3: Distribution of forced marriage of people with learning disability, by age*

Public data from the FMU (Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Home Office statistics, 2010- 2018) shows that, amongst the general population, around half of all forced marriages take place when the victim is aged between 16 and 21 and very few forced marriages (<10%) are reported after the age of 30. However, the age-related pattern of forced marriage amongst people with learning disabilities shows a rather different pattern: a smaller proportion of victims are under 21 and they face an increased risk of forced marriage not only between the ages of 22-30, which is when up to half all reported forced marriages of people with learning disabilities occur but also on into their 30s, with up to a quarter of all cases occurring in those aged 31 or older. The age at which a person with learning disabilities is most likely to be forced to marry can be linked to the reasons why parents and family carers may wish to procure a marriage for their relative with a learning disability – namely, to secure a long-term carer (McCarthy et al, under review; Clawson & Fyson, 2017).

### **Sex**

Much of the general literature (and Government policy) on forced marriage alludes to it being an issue affecting predominantly young females. However, table 4 shows a comparisons of the male-to-female ratios of victims of forced marriage with and without learning disabilities, and reveals substantial differences in the sex of victims.

*Table 4: Distribution of forced marriage 2010-2015 by sex ratio and disability*

The exact ratios differ slightly each year, but the overall picture is that roughly 80% of all victims of forced marriage are female and only 20% are male. However, amongst people with learning disabilities the figures are very different: the overall male-to-female ratio is roughly fifty-fifty, with cases involving male victims in a majority in recent years. This trend has continued since this study was completed, with published FMU statistics for 2016 and 2017 showing reported cases involving men with a learning disability at 61% and 53%, respectively (Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Home Office, 2017 & 2018a).

## **The geographies of UK forced marriages involving a spouse with learning disabilities**

Geographies of forced marriage are significant because although the FMU does not systematically collect data about ethnicity it does record both the region of the UK in which the victim lives and the ‘focus country’ of the forced marriage, defined as:

*“The ‘focus country’ is the country to which the forced marriage risk relates. This could be the country where the forced marriage is due to take place, or the country that the spouse is currently residing in (or both).”* (Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Home Office, 2018a p.10).

Explored together, these geographies of forced marriage – by which we mean both the victims’ UK region and the focus country of the marriage – can tell us something about the risks of forced marriage amongst people with learning disabilities in ethnic minority communities.

### ***Focus country***

Although some forced marriages involving UK citizens take place in the UK, around 90% take place overseas (Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Home Office, 2017 & 2018a). The FMU reports that, since its inception, it has dealt with cases of forced marriage involving over 90 focus countries, with 65 different focus countries noted in the most recent year for which data is available (Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Home Office, 2018a). Knowing more about the focus country in relation to forced marriages involving someone with learning disabilities can help us to better understand which individuals may be at greater risk. This is because in most, though not all, cases the focus country will reflect the ethnicity/family background of the victim.

Table 5 shows the number of forced marriages of people with learning disabilities from each of the eight most frequently-occurring focus countries between 2009 and 2015. Pakistan is consistently the most frequent country of focus, accounting for between 31.4% and 58.9% of forced marriages in any given year, and 45.8% of forced marriages across all years. Three other countries are focus countries in a high number of recorded cases. Bangladesh is the focus country for 13.4% of recorded cases across all years, with a particular ‘peak’ of 21.6% of cases in 2010; India is the focus country for 12.8% of recorded cases across all years and was the focus country for a third of all cases in 2009; and the UK is the focus country for 11.6% of all recorded cases across all years with a ‘peak’ of 20% of all recorded cases in 2014.

*Table 5: Focus country of forced marriages involving someone with learning disabilities*

The geographical spread of focus countries in part reflects UK patterns of immigration, which in turn reflect the UK's history of colonialism. There are settled, multi-generational communities in the UK originating from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and elsewhere; statistics for England and Wales indicate that 2.5% of the overall population is of Indian heritage, 2.0% of Pakistani heritage and 0.8% of Bangladeshi heritage (Office for National Statistics, 2019). However, focus countries are not simply a reflection of immigration – religious and cultural expectations within these communities also play a significant role, particularly beliefs about marriage (McCarthy et al, under review) and this may explain the increased incidence of some focus countries.

As well as recognising that people with learning disabilities from South Asian, and particularly Pakistani, backgrounds are at heightened risk of forced marriage, it is important to note that a significant minority of forced marriages (almost 12% of the total across all years) have a focus country which is not in the 'top eight'. This means that professionals should be wary of making assumptions about the likelihood of forced marriage based purely on ethnicity, as forced marriages can and do occur amongst individuals of all ethnic and national backgrounds. Moreover, it is likely that patterns in the country of focus will change as patterns of immigration change. For example, amongst all forced marriages (not just those involving people with learning disabilities) FMU statistics for 2017 show Somalia overtaking India as the third most frequent country of focus (Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Home Office, 2018a).

#### ***Parts of the UK from which recorded cases originated***

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the parts of the UK from which victims of forced marriage originate closely correspond to the areas of the UK which have the most ethnically diverse populations and the largest numbers of people of South Asian heritage.

*Table 6: Parts of the UK from which recorded cases originate*

As table 6 shows, of the 554 cases of forced marriage involving someone with a learning disability, 26% (144) originated from the London area; 18.8% (104) from the West Midlands; 12.3% (68) from

the South East; and 10.5% (58) from the North West. Despite some gaps in the data, where geographical region was not recorded, these four regions accounted for almost 70% of the total figures during the relevant time period.

Knowing that forced marriage is more prevalent in certain regions may help to encourage public authorities in these regions to raise awareness amongst staff. However, it must also be noted that over one third of all cases occurred in regions not named above, and that cases of forced marriage of people with learning disabilities are known to have occurred in all countries and all regions of the UK.

## **Identifying and reporting cases of forced marriage of people with learning disabilities**

The third and final factor which was explored through the FMU data was information about who reported cases of forced marriage involving people with learning disabilities. Knowing who reports cases can help us to better understand where to focus safeguarding efforts and to pinpoint 'agents' who are under-represented for targeted training.

### *Table 7: Reporters of forced marriage of people with learning disabilities*

Across all years the highest proportion – over one third of all reports of forced marriage of people with learning disabilities – have come from local authority Social Services (35.4% from 2009-2015). Cases are also reported by a wide range of other professionals, including health, education, police, and criminal justice. Although each individual profession represents only a small proportion of reported cases, together these account for 60.6% of all cases reported between 2009 and 2015. This may suggest that many different professionals need to understand the risk of forced marriage that is faced by people with learning disabilities and that more awareness-raising is needed.

It is also notable that, since 2013, an increasing proportion of reports each year (amounting to 37% in 2013, 43.7% in 2014 and 44.7% in 2015) has come from the UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) (previously the UK Border Agency). This reflects both an increased understanding of forced marriage by the UKVI and closer co-operation with the FMU, including greater sharing of information.

Only a small proportion of cases were reported directly by victims themselves (2.3% across all years) or their friends and family (4.9% across all years). The low numbers reported directly by victims is perhaps unsurprising, given that some victims may have limited verbal communication and many/most may lack knowledge about the FMU. The low numbers reported by friends and family tell a slightly different story – it may similarly reflect lack of knowledge about the FMU or forced marriage itself, but could also be influenced by cultural beliefs about marriage<sup>1</sup>, fear of government authorities and unwillingness to ‘point the finger’ at family members. This suggests that much work remains to be done to better inform some communities about the negative impacts of forced marriage of people with learning disabilities and to make such marriages culturally unacceptable.

## Limitations of the study

This study was based upon an analysis of cases of forced marriage reported to the FMU; it cannot be known whether this is a representative sample of all cases of forced marriage within the UK. The quantitative data, particularly during the earlier years, was notable for having significant amounts of missing data. For example, the victim’s age was only recorded in 334/554 (60%) of cases. Nevertheless, this study has provided new evidence about the demographics and geographies of forced marriage of UK citizens with learning disabilities, which may help to raise awareness of risk.

## Discussion

The analysis of FMU data presented in this paper both provides new evidence about the demographics of forced marriage of people with learning disabilities in the UK and raises a number of questions about how best to respond to this safeguarding challenge. Firstly, the data makes clear that the overall risk of forced marriage is higher for people with learning disabilities who account for around 10% of all cases of forced marriage, but just 2% of the general population. The intersections between disability, age and sex also show some significant differences between people with and without learning disabilities who are forced to marry. Here, the FMU data has confirmed earlier suggestions that both the age and sex of learning disabled victims of forced marriage are different from non-disabled victims; those with learning disabilities are more likely to be male and more likely

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<sup>1</sup> Cultural issues may include not only holding marriage in high regard but also believing that marriage can ‘cure’ someone of their learning disability (author, 2016)

to be older. These findings are important. In the UK, campaigns aimed at preventing forced marriage through raising public and professional awareness have tended to focus on young women as the most at-risk group; young men, and older people of either sex, have been largely absent from the public discourse of forced marriage.

The demographics of forced marriage of people with learning disabilities may be linked to the reasons why people with learning disabilities are forced to marry. In particular, the desire on the part of (ageing) parents to secure a reliable carer for their son or daughter needs to be understood (Patterson et al, 2018; McCarthy et al, under review). This does not excuse forced marriage, but it does go some way towards explaining the demographics of forced marriage amongst people with learning disabilities, given that the pressure to secure long-term care increases as people age and that men and women are equally likely to need such carers. This factor needs to be viewed within the context of service use by families from specific communities. In writing about the provision of care to people with learning disabilities from ethnic minority groups, Singh & Orimalade note that “cultural and religious attitudes are important in how care is sought, delivered and accepted” (2009, p.405) citing a studies which found many South Asian families prefer care to be provided by a relative (Fatimilehin & Nardishaw, 1994) and that seeking or receiving support from outside agencies carries stigma which may prevent engagement with services (Gilligan & Aktar, 2006). The lack of trust between some ethnic minority communities and statutory services may also boost the desire to obtain care through marriage (Patterson et al, 2018, McCarthy et al, under review). For families seeking external support a range of common challenges emerge to the provision of culturally sensitive care, including language barriers, differences in cultural views (including gender and generational views) and differing values (IRISS, 2010; Lindsay et al, 2014) which may further exacerbate a reluctance to seek support. This suggests that forced marriage might be reduced through the provision of more and better culturally competent services combined with outreach work to explain the availability of publicly funded services to communities where incidence of forced marriage is highest.

The FMU data has shown that although the demographics of forced marriage differ between learning disabled and non-learning-disabled populations within the UK, the geographies of forced marriage are broadly the same. In other words, forced marriage of people with learning disabilities is associated with the same regions of the UK and the same focus countries regardless of whether or not learning disability is present. While this suggests that preventative measures might *currently*

most usefully be targeted at South Asian communities, the changing geographies of forced marriage cannot be disregarded. The FMU data shows an immense diversity in focus countries and reveals that the geographies of forced marriage are shifting in response to changes in patterns of immigration. International evidence supports the idea that forced marriage is associated with patterns of international migration from countries where the marriage is held in high esteem, both culturally and religiously. For example, in Germany, where there is a longstanding, settled Turkish community but few people of South Asian heritage, forced marriage is most often associated with the Turkish community (DW.com, 2011); and research in Canada has noted forced marriage linked to Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Cuba (Bendriss, 2008). In the UK, Somalia has recently emerged as an increasingly frequent focus country (Parveen, 2018) but other significant focus countries may emerge as patterns of global migration continue to fluctuate in response to world politics and climate change. This will require increased vigilance amongst professionals in new regions of the UK as patterns of settlement gradually become evident.

Finally, the FMU data was able to tell us something about who is most likely to report the forced marriage of someone with a learning disability. The high proportion of reporting from social services professionals indicates that they are well-placed to identify – and potentially to prevent – forced marriages amongst users of adult social care services, but it is unclear why reporting by other professionals is low in comparison. This may simply reflect a better understanding of the safeguarding implications of forced marriage and/or better awareness of the functions of the FMU amongst social services professionals. Overall, however, the diverse range of professionals involved in reporting cases to the FMU suggests an ongoing need to raise awareness across many professions, including not only social work but also health care, education, police and criminal justice. More recent data (Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Home Office, 2017 & 2018a) shows that the single biggest source of reports is now the UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI). Whilst this finding demonstrates the value of joined-up working between different Government departments, there is also a note of caution to be sounded here. UKVI is, necessarily, primarily concerned with the application of visa requirements and immigration law; it is not primarily concerned with safeguarding vulnerable adults. Whilst it is encouraging that UKVI is able to identify and prevent some forced marriages, their focus is likely to be largely on excluding the overseas spouse. This may not always safeguard the person with a learning disability, particularly in cases where they are sent to live abroad after the marriage has taken place. For safeguarding to be effective, close working is needed between multiple branches of local and national Government, between multiple different professionals and across multiple communities.



One of the messages from this study is that, although there are demographic features of forced marriage which appear to be linked to learning disability and associated with particular ethnic minority communities in specific regions of the UK, forced marriage can and does happen to people with learning disabilities in all regions and from all ethnic groups, including white British (BBC News, 2010). Whilst resources can be targeted at 'hotspots' this will only result in partial success in reducing forced marriage amongst people with learning disabilities. This is because the demographics and geographies of forced marriage will continue to change as the UK population changes. In light of this, it is important that the risk of forced marriage associated with learning disabilities becomes better known.

## Conclusion

The key findings from this analysis of FMU data are:

1. that people with learning disabilities face a **five times greater risk** of forced marriage than people without learning disabilities;
2. that men and women with learning disabilities are equally likely to be forced to marry;
3. that the risk of forced marriage for people with learning disabilities remains high across the lifespan;
4. that forced marriage of people with learning disabilities in the UK is at present most often found within South Asian communities, but that as patterns of inward migration into the UK change the focus countries of forced marriage are also likely to change;
5. that areas of the UK with larger South Asian population are currently also associated with higher numbers of forced marriage, but this is also likely to change as migration changes.

This new knowledge can help to support improved safeguarding practice, but only if more people are aware of these facts and resources are allocated accordingly. At present, UK statutory safeguarding adults guidance makes no mention of forced marriage, let alone forced marriage of people with learning disabilities (Department of Health & Social Care, 2018). This is despite the fact that the guidance names over 50 different ways in which a vulnerable adult may be abused or neglected, including some (so called 'honour' based violence, forced labour and domestic servitude) which are closely associated with forced marriage. The omission of forced marriage from the

guidance is an oversight which urgently needs to be rectified in order to encourage Local Safeguarding Adults Boards to engage more fully in the risks faced by people with learning disabilities (Clawson, 2016). Until that time, the findings from this analysis of FMU data go some way towards raising awareness of the increased risk of forced marriage that is faced by people with learning disabilities in the UK.

The wider outputs from this research project include a range of tools and awareness raising resources that are available to download for free:

- ❖ **Forced Marriage Awareness Film:** An educational film that includes powerful real cases, expert analysis and key messages for families and practitioners available in four languages <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/groups/mymarriagemychoice/film/index.aspx>
- ❖ **Practice guidance toolkit for assessing capacity to consent to marriage:** This is designed to be used by any frontline practitioner involved in assessing capacity to consent to marriage <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/groups/mymarriagemychoice/guidelines-resources/index.aspx>
- ❖ **Case study collection:** This is designed to tell the stories of people with learning disabilities who have been forced to marry. Each case study is a composite of various stories and reports from actual cases though the people depicted in them are fictional. <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/groups/mymarriagemychoice/documents/case-studies.pdf>
- ❖ **Workbooks on forced marriage:** These are designed to be used by practitioners working with people with learning disabilities and their families <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/groups/mymarriagemychoice/workbooks/index.aspx>

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## Tables

*Table 1: Disability and forced marriage in the UK\**

<b>Year</b>	<b>No. of cases where the FMU gave advice or support relating to possible forced marriage</b>	<b>No. (%) of cases involving a person with disabilities</b>
2009	Unknown	15 (Aug - Dec)
2010	1735	70 (4.0%)
2011	1468	66 (4.5%)
2012	1485	114 (7.7%)
2013	1302	97 (7.5%)
2014	1267	135 (10.7%)
2015	1220	141 (11.6%)
2016^	1428	140 (9.8%)
2017^	1196	125 (10.5%)

\* Data in this table is from statistics published annually by the FMU

Table 2: Development of information within FMU case notes

Year	All FMU cases	Cases involving learning disability	Learning disability cases with notes	Level of detail within notes
2009	Unknown <sup>^</sup>	N = 15 (% n/a)	3 / 5 (% n/a)	Very scant notes – mostly UK location of ‘case’
2010	1735	N = 51 (2.9%)	12 / 51 (20%)	UK location and some very brief descriptions of cases
2011	1468	N = 58 (4.0%)	24 / 58 (23%)	More detailed notes begin during latter part of 2011, in some cases including the call-takers’ actions
2012	1485	N = 54 (3.6%)	36 / 54 (67%)	More detailed descriptions of cases, including the call-takers’ actions
2013	1302	N = 100 (7.7%)	100 / 100 (100%)	Additional notes for all cases involving learning disability. Variable in length and detail, but many being quite extensive*
2014	1267	N = 135 (10.7%)	135 / 135 (100%)	Additional notes for all cases involving learning disability. Variable in length and detail; 77 of 135 (57%) were cross-referenced to other Government databases
2015	1220	N = 141 (11.6%)	141 / 141 (100%)	Additional notes for all cases involving learning disability. Variable in length and detail; 84 of 141 (60%) were cross-referenced to other Government databases

<sup>^</sup> 2009 was the year that recording of disability was introduced at the FMU; because it was introduced in August, the number of cases involving learning disability applies only to the months August-December and not the whole year

*Table 3: Distribution of forced marriage of people with learning disability, by age*

Year	No. of LD cases	No. (%) of LD cases with age recorded	Age range (years) & no. of cases						No. (%) missing data
			11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60+	
2009	15	0 (0%)							15 (100%)
2010	51	21 (41%)	12	7	1			1	30 (59%)
2011	58	33 (57%)	13	13	4	3			25 (43%)
2012	54	16 (30%)	7	6	3				38 (70%)
2013	100	23 (23%)	8	13	2				77 (77%)
2014	135	112 (83%)	24 (21%)	59 (53%)	25 (22%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	23 (17%)
2015	141	129 (91%)	26 (20%)	71 (55%)	21 (16%)	7 (5%)	3 (2%)	1 (1%)	12 (9%)
All years	554	334 (60%)	90	168	56	13	4	2	220 (40%)



Table 4: Distribution of forced marriage 2010-2015 by sex ratio and disability

<b>All cases/cases involving learning disability by sex ratio</b>		
Year	All cases Male-to-female ratio	Cases involving learning disability <sup>^</sup> Male-to-female ratio
2009	n/a	53:47
2010	14:86	36:64
2011	22:78	47:53
2012	18:82	43:57
2013	18:82	49:51
2014	21:79	55:45
2015	20:80	62:38

<sup>^</sup> Gender was recorded for 551 out of 554 cases; cases where gender was not recorded are excluded from calculations

Table 5: Focus country of forced marriages involving someone with learning disabilities

Focus Country <sup>^</sup>	2009		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		TOTAL	
	No.	% in yr	No.	% in yr	No.	% in yr	No.	% in yr	No.	% in yr	No.	% in yr	No.	% in yr	No.	% all yrs
Afghanistan	0	0.0%	1	2.0%	1	1.7%	1	1.9%	0	0.0%	1	0.7%	3	2.1%	7	1.3%
Bangladesh	1	6.7%	11	21.6%	8	13.8%	5	9.3%	19	19.0%	12	8.9%	18	12.8%	74	13.4%
India	5	33.3%	6	11.8%	6	10.3%	7	13.0%	20	20.0%	17	12.6%	10	7.1%	71	12.8%
Nigeria	1	6.7%	2	3.9%	1	1.7%	0	0.0%	2	2.0%	1	0.7%	0	0.0%	7	1.3%
Pakistan	6	40.0%	16	31.4%	28	48.3%	26	48.1%	33	33.0%	62	45.9%	83	58.9%	254	45.8%
Somalia	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	3.0%	0	0.0%	3	2.1%	6	1.1%
Turkey	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	1.9%	1	1.0%	4	3.0%	0	0.0%	6	1.1%
UK	0	0.0%	3	5.9%	3	5.2%	5	9.3%	10	10.0%	27	20.0%	16	11.3%	64	11.6%
Other*	2	13.3%	12	23.5%	11	19.0%	9	16.7%	12	12.0%	11	8.1%	8	5.7%	65	11.7%
TOTAL	15	100.0%	51	100.0%	58	100.0%	54	100.0%	100	100.0%	135	100.0%	141	100.0%	554	100.0%

\*Where total incidence <1% or focus country was not recorded/known

<sup>^</sup> Focus country was recorded for 516 out of 554 cases; cases where focus country was not recorded are excluded from calculations

Table 6: Parts of the UK from which recorded cases originate

<b>Country or region of UK</b>	<b>No. of cases 2009-2015</b>	<b>% of cases 2009-2015</b>
East	12	2.2%
East Midlands	32	5.2%
London	144	26.0%
North East	15	2.7%
Northern Ireland	0	0%
North West	58	10.5%
Scotland	11	2.0%
South East	68	12.3%
South West	7	1.3%
Wales	9	1.6%
West Midlands	104	18.8%
Yorkshire & Humberside	48	8.7%
Not known	46	8.3%

Table 7: Reporters of forced marriage of people with learning disabilities

Reporter <sup>^</sup>		Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total across all years
Victim	No.		2	1	0	1	4	5	0	13
	% in year		13.3%	2.0%	0.0%	1.9%	4.0%	3.7%	0.0%	2.3%
Friend/Relative	No.		0	5	4	10	2	4	2	27
	% in year		0.0%	9.8%	6.9%	18.5%	2.0%	3.0%	1.4%	4.9%
Social Services Professional	No.		8	17	27	24	35	38	47	196
	% in year		53.3%	33.3%	46.6%	44.4%	35%	28.1%	33.3%	35.4%
School/Education Professional	No.		1	4	5	2	4	4	2	22
	% in year		6.7%	7.8%	8.6%	3.7%	4%	3%	1.4%	4%
Health Professional	No.		0	4	3	11	5	7	5	35
	% in year		0.0%	7.8%	5.2%	20.4%	5.0%	5.2%	3.5%	6.3%
Legal Professional	No.		0	5	2	1	0	0	3	11
	% in year		0.0%	9.8%	3.4%	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%	2.0%
Police Professional	No.		3	8	6	1	5	9	11	43
	% in year		20.0%	15.7%	10.3%	1.9%	5.0%	6.7%	7.8%	7.8%
Other professional /statutory agency	No.		0	3	4	4	6	8	3	28
	% in year		0.0%	5.9%	6.9%	7.4%	6.0%	5.9%	2.1%	5.1%
All Professionals	No.		12	41	47	43	55	66	71	335
	% in year		80%	80.3%	81%	79.7%	55%	48.9%	50.2%	60.6%
NGO	No.		1	3	3	0	2	0	5	14
	% in year		6.7%	5.9%	5.2%	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	3.5%	2.5%
UKBA/UKVI	No.		0	0	4	0	37	59	63	163
	% in year		0.0%	0.0%	6.9%	0.0%	37%	43.7%	44.7%	29.4%
Anonymous	No.		0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
	% in year		0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	0.4%
<b>Total</b>	No.		15	51	58	54	100	135	141	554
	% in year		(100%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)

<sup>^</sup> Reporter was recorded for 552 out of 554 cases; in 2 cases the report was made anonymously