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**Recent Research -Voices from the Frontline:  
Addressing Forced Marriage within the  
United States**

Guest Presenters: *Vidya Sri & Darakshan Raja*  
February 20, 2014



Webinar hosted by: Heather Heiman  
Forced Marriage Initiative Manager  
& Senior Public Policy Attorney  
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**Tahirih's Forced Marriage Initiative**

In 2011, Tahirih launched the:

- Forced Marriage Initiative
- National Network to Prevent Forced Marriage

in response to the findings of Tahirih's Survey on Forced Marriage in Immigrant Communities in the United States.

This webinar is part of a quarterly series.




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Slide 3

**Voices From The Frontline**  
Addressing Forced Marriage in the United States  
By Vidya Sri  
Darakshan Raja




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**Acknowledgements**

- Interviewees
- Questionnaire Respondents
- Survivors

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**Quote**

*"My eyes were blurry. I was lying on the floor. The pills were coming up with the alcohol through the vomit in my throat. I could hear my father screaming that I would never go back home to American until I married the man he chose."*

-Survivor

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**Defining FM**

- U.S. State Dept.
- Tahiri Justice Center
- Manavi
- Gangashakti

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U.S. State Department

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- Definition of Forced Marriage:
- The US State Department defines a forced marriage as one where an individual doesn't consent or isn't able to consent, and some form of duress is applied (US Department of State, 2005).

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Tahirih Justice Center

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- Definition of Forced Marriage:
- A marriage that takes place without the full and free consent of one or both parties.
- Forced marriages can happen at any age and to either gender; the marriage may have already taken place, or is currently in the process of taking place within the United States or abroad. The lack of consent may be the result of being 1) incapacitated or having a disability, 2) subjected to force, fraud, or coercion, or, 3) younger than the legal age to marry (Tahirih Justice Center, 2011)

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Manavi

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A survey conducted by Manavi on South Asian women's organizations reported forced marriage was commonly defined among service providers as encompassing the following elements:

- A marriage against one's will that is the result of cultural, familial, and societal pressures.
- When individuals are put in a situation where they have no choice or control over their own partner in a marriage.
- A tool of patriarchy used to control women's sexuality.
- Holding women in captivity physically or emotionally and forcing a marriage upon her.
- Forcing women or a child to marry someone against their will.

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### Gangashakti

- Definition of Forced Marriage:
- A marriage with an absence of consent and the use of force, fraud, and/or coercion to cause the marriage.

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### Research

- Only national statistics that are available are from Tahirih Justice Center
- Within a 2 year period, agencies across the country reported receiving approximately 5000 known and suspected cases of forced marriage from a sample of over 500 direct services providers.
- 67 percent of respondents reported cases of forced marriage weren't being identified, hence, there was a significant "hidden population" of victims of forced marriage.
- Perhaps, most importantly the survey found the majority of agencies weren't equipped in properly handling cases of forced marriage (Tahirih Justice Center, 2011).

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### Legislative Review

- Nine states across the country have statutes on forced marriage.
- In comparing state laws with definitions of forced marriage, we found that none of the states explicitly included the absence of full consent as a central piece of what constitutes a forced marriage; and, neither did all state codes on forced marriage cover all classes of offenders or victims

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### The Questionnaire included:

- Did workshop attendees come across known cases of forced marriage?
- Did workshop attendees know of suspected cases of forced marriage?
- How many known and suspected cases of forced marriage were respondents aware of?
- What forms of abuse did attendees come across as a result of forced marriage cases?

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### Questionnaire Breakdown

- Sample

Table 2: Breakdown of Survey Sample

|                                      | (n) | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|-----|------------|
| Refugee Service Providers            | 62  | 23%        |
| Domestic Violence (DV) professionals | 161 | 31%        |
| Students                             | 301 | 57%        |
| Total                                | 524 | 100%       |

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### Reports of Confirmed/Suspected Cases

- Total Number of Cases: At least 531 cases
- 56 percent reported knowing of confirmed/suspected cases

Table 3: Number of Known and Suspected Forced Marriage Cases

|  | 1<br>(n=109) | 2<br>(n=130) | 3+<br>(n=54) |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Reports on the number of cases individuals reported (n=293/524, 56%) | 37%          | 44%          | 18%          |

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### Known Cases of FM

- 37 percent of entire sample of respondents (N=524) reported known cases
- Students reported 61% of the known cases

|   | Percentage by Number of Known Cases (n=193) | Percentage of Known Cases within individual group |
|---|---|---|
| Religious Services Providers (n=43)   | 24%   | 14%   |
| Domestic Violence (DV) professionals (n=140)                                  | 25%   | 36%   |
| Workshops at college campuses with mostly students of S. Asian Descent (n=50) | 41%   | 38%   |

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### Characteristics of Violence in FM

- Our questionnaire asked respondents to report forms of violence and abuse they came across as a result of a forced marriage.
- In order to maintain the validity of our data, we excluded any cases where individuals reported they suspected cases of forced marriage.
- Our findings for this section only cover respondents that reported they came across known cases of forced marriage.

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### Characteristics of Violence in FM (Continued)

| Characteristic                  | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|------------|
| Emotional Violence (n=156)      | 33%        |
| Domestic Violence (n=154)       | 36%        |
| Physical Violence (n=68)        | 21%        |
| Financial/Economic Abuse (n=68) | 23%        |
| Stigma (n=46)                   | 24%        |
| Depression (n=47)               | 50%        |
| Attempted Suicide (n=29)        | 15%        |
| Alcohol Dependence (n=23)       | 12%        |
| Substance Abuse (n=23)          | 9%         |
| Suicide (n=4)                   | 2%         |

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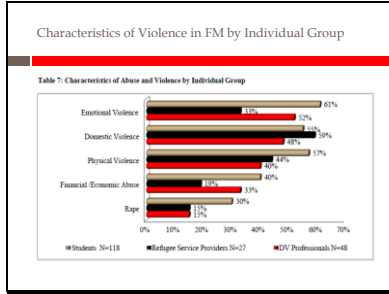
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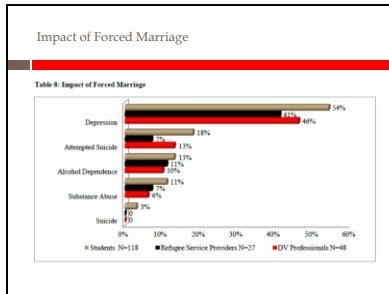


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### Characteristics of Abuse and Violence by Individual Group

- Overall students reported the highest rates of witnessing forms of violence as a consequence of forced marriage. For each individual form of abuse—with the exception of domestic violence—students reported a higher percentage of witnessing emotional violence, physical violence, financial/economic abuse, and rape as a consequence of forced marriage.
- Almost 1 in 3 students reported coming across rape as a result of forced marriage.
- It is also important to note only students reported coming across suicide cases as a direct consequence of forced marriage cases.

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II. Case Reviews

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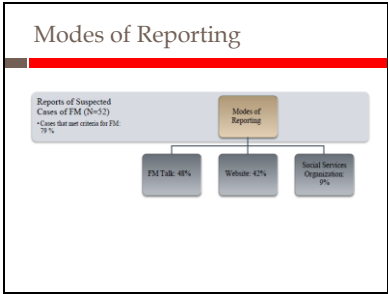


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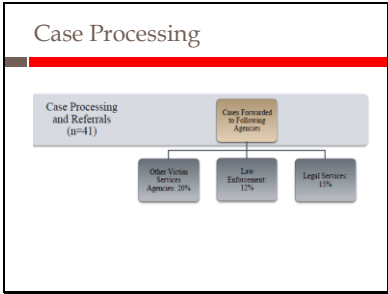


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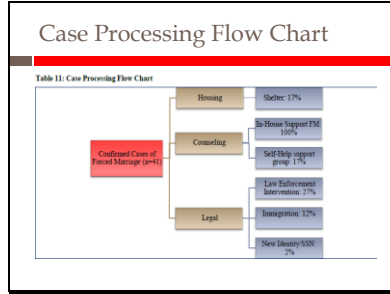


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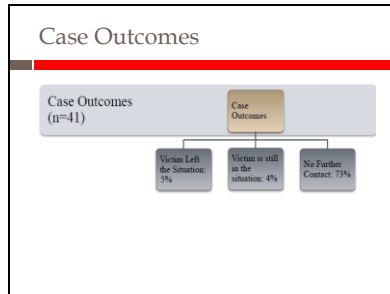
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### III. Interview Findings

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"Forced Marriage is the earthquake that is followed by a tsunami of consequences." -Nazir Afzal

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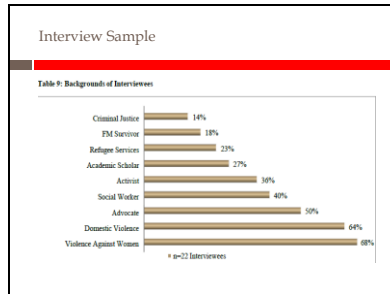
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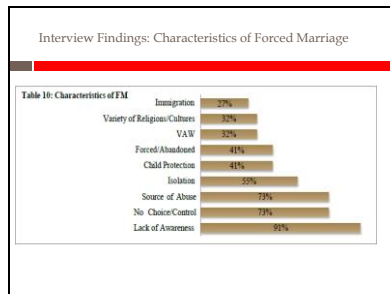
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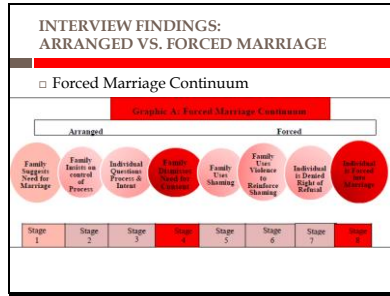
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**Types of Violence Used Against Victims**

| Graphic B: Characteristics of the Types of Violence Used by Abusers | Graphic C: Effects on Victims of Forced Marriage |
|---|--|
| Stalking  | Isolation  |
| Sexual Abuse  | Unwanted Intercourse                             |
| Stalking and Rape   | Suicidal Thoughts                                |
| Forced Abandonment of Career  | Alcohol & Substance Abuse                        |
| Involvement with Dangerous Groups                                   | Post Work/Academic Record                        |
| Physical & Economic Abuse   | Executive Absence from Work/School               |
| Coercive Control  | Depression                                       |

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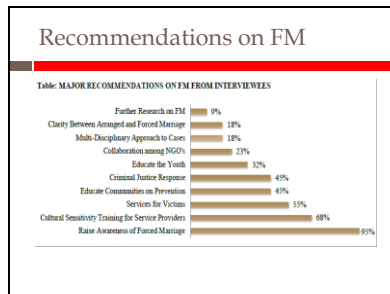


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*"The whole community is not responsible for the criminality within it. We identify community leaders who can galvanize and come together on this issue. We are focused on driving a community led response, not a state led response." -Nazir Afzal*

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**Limitations and Future Directions**

- The study is only limited to a few states, and hence we can't make generalizations on the occurrence and incidence of forced marriage cases in the entire country.
- Most importantly we want to note that despite all the work that has been done on the issue of forced marriage, the invisibility of the voices of victims of forced marriage in driving this work and directly speaking to their experiences with forced marriage is a major limitation of our study.
- While we did have a few survivors contribute to this study, we suggest that future studies should prioritize and ensure that voices of survivors are at the forefront of improving responses to the issue of forced marriage.

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**Conclusions**

- Additional points we want to add is that despite the limitations of this study, our findings were concerning because of the high rates of victimization reported by youth.
- Cases of forced marriage are underreported. Further while we didn't ask youth if they themselves were survivors of forced marriage, or how exactly they came across known cases of forced marriage, we can state that at the least these youth experienced secondary victimization by witnessing a form of abuse such as forced marriage.
- Many of them also did report witnessing domestic violence, physical violence, rape, and in some of the most severe cases the suicide of someone they know who took their life as a consequence of forced marriage.
- It is important to note none of the direct service providers reported coming across cases of suicide as a consequence of forced marriage.

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**Conclusions**

- In concluding we want to highlight that there is a community of deeply concerned, hard-working men and women who are continuously analyzing and assessing the harmful practice of forced marriage in the United States.
- It is with deep gratitude that this paper was written to document the work of responders that are working to impact the current response to forced marriage in the United States.

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For information on upcoming webinars, trainings, and news about forced marriage in the United States, please sign up for the:

**National Network to Prevent Forced Marriage  
&  
Forced Marriage Newsletter**

at Tahirih's website:  
[www.tahirih.org/advocacy/policy-areas/forced-marriage-initiative/](http://www.tahirih.org/advocacy/policy-areas/forced-marriage-initiative/)

Or contact: [FMI@tahirih.org](mailto:FMI@tahirih.org)  
571.282.6161



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