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What Do We Believe?

- What comes to our minds when we think about forced marriage?
 - Who are the victims?
 - Who are the perpetrators?
 - Where does forced marriage occur?
 - What are some images that comes to mind?

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Forced Marriage in Context

Prevalence of Child Marriages: Married Girls Under 18

Source: www.unicef.org/press/2013/03/130313_00022.html

- Which countries surprise you and why?
- Why may some countries not have data?
- Let's consider the U.S. -- which areas and communities may be impacted?

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(Debunking) Common Assumptions

- Forced marriage:
 - Does not occur in the United States
 - Is a cultural practice followed by the majority of members of particular immigrant communities
 - Is a religious practice
 - Is the same as arranged marriage
 - Requires physical force
 - Only affects women and girls
- Where do we hear messages or see images about forced marriage?

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Statistics in the United States

- Forced marriage is a problem in the U.S. today, with as many as 3,000 known and suspected cases identified by respondents to a 2011 national survey (Tahirih Justice Center, 2011).
- Forced marriage affects individuals in communities from at least 56 different countries and various religious backgrounds, as well as nonimmigrant communities (Tahirih Justice Center, 2011).

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Forced Marriage: A Hidden Problem

- Forced marriage is often underreported.
 - Forced marriage is often confused with arranged marriage.
- Forced marriage often occurs with other practices of gender violence (ex. female genital mutilation, sexual assault, and trafficking), and victims are more vulnerable to domestic violence. Instead of the forced marriage, victims may first come forward or report these other forms of violence.

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What is Arranged Marriage?

- In many regions of the world, marriage has long been viewed as a means of uniting families, not only individuals.
 - Marriage has been seen as an opportunity to preserve, consolidate, or extend family property.
 - As joint family and multigenerational households have been the norm, marriage has also meant that the bride lives not only with her new husband, but also with his extended family.
- Today, the term "arranged marriage" generally refers to a marriage in which family or community members are involved in selecting potential spouses.

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What is Love Marriage?

- The term "love marriage" generally refers to a marriage originating from a relationship of mutual love and affection between potential spouses.
- Nonetheless, it is misleading to view arranged marriage and love marriage as dichotomous.
- Individuals often choose to marry their spouses, regardless of family involvement, for reasons other than mutual love and affection.
- Some marriages that are referred to as "arranged" take place after an individual asks family or community members to help them find a potential spouse. These situations may closely resemble matchmaking and dating practices even in communities where "arranged marriage" is not considered a common practice.

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What Is Forced Marriage?

- Regardless of whether a marriage is considered "arranged" or "love," it is not a forced marriage as long as both potential spouses have the ultimate choice or decision to accept or reject the proposal or arrangement.
- The defining feature of a forced marriage is the **lack of full free and informed consent** of one or both spouses.
- Reasons for lack of consent include:
 - Lack of capacity to give valid consent (child/underage)
 - Presence of familial/community pressure, coercion, deception/fraud, or violence

Even if an individual says "yes" to a marriage, that "yes" is only as meaningful as his or her ability to say "no."

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The Marriage Continuum

- Forced marriage may be understood as one end of a continuum or spectrum.
- Dynamics in an intimate partner relationship can also shift over time:
 - At different points before the marriage takes place.
 - After the marriage takes place.

Resources for Families & Arab American Family Support Center (2011)

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Intersectionality

- Individuals hold multiple identities
- Shaped by personal experiences
- In the context of overlapping communities and value systems
- Impact of structures - value systems and experiences that extend over time and impact collective and individual thought

Examples of ideologies/structures: patriarchy, classism, capitalism

Violence can escalate due to different factors and pressures that go overlooked if we do not consider the impact of intersectionality on narratives of power and privilege and experiences of victimization (shame).

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Intersectionality: Forced Marriage & Other Forms of Violence

Example: Forced marriage and Domestic Violence

- A young man is forced to marry a young woman against his will, and cannot marry a different woman he is actually interested in. In some cases over time this may foster resentment and lead to neglect or even animosity (violence) towards the woman, who may or may not have been forced into the marriage herself.
- NOTE: This slide does NOT imply causation between Forced Marriage and other forms of violence or justify them, but shows possible correlation between forced marriage and these other forms of violence in some situations.

It is important to consider intersectionality

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Scenario: Marisol

When Marisol was a teenager in Mexico, she befriended a boy named Juan in her religion classes. Rumors spread in her village about the two of them having a sexual relationship. Marisol's parents grew concerned and warned her that she would ruin her reputation and shame their family if she did not go ahead and marry Juan. Even though Marisol did not want to marry Juan, she was forced to do so under her parents' threats of disownment. Juan began emotionally abusing Marisol—he told her she had ruined his life, that she was not the girl he wanted to marry, and that she was worthless. Juan also became physical violent, so much so that one day, Marisol lost consciousness from his beatings. After recovering in the hospital, Marisol escaped and fled to the U.S.

In the U.S., Marisol fell in love with Steven, her neighbor. Eventually, she felt comfortable enough to tell him about her life in Mexico. Marisol was touched to see that Steven felt sad for her and thought she had found a better partner. However, Steven's behavior also changed after she moved in with him. Steven withheld food from her unless she had sex with him. He also shared Marisol's past with his friends. He told them he could do whatever he wanted to Marisol because she was used to being treated like this as part of her culture and because she did not have immigration status. One day, while Steven was out with his friends, Marisol managed to escape and move into a shelter. She was referred to a social worker and an attorney by her shelter case worker. While Steven's abuse was fresh in her mind, Marisol had a more difficult time opening up to her social worker and attorney about her forced marriage to Juan.

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Unintended Consequences

- Tamara is a young woman in New York City who lives at home with her family and attends a local college. She is physically assaulted by a female classmate and police are alerted. Her family is supportive at the precinct and does not blame her for the incident. Partially through the criminal investigation with the local District Attorney's Office, Tamara shares with the victim support staff that her family is arranging for her to be married and she is uncomfortable with this. In subsequent sessions, she shares that her family came to learn from discussions with law enforcement that the female classmate was a former girlfriend and that they were blindsided by learning about her same-sex attraction. Their focus was now on securing an opposite-sex marriage in an effort to recover their collective sense of "normal" identity (heterosexuality).

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Footprints: Factors and Interventions

- Our actions may be well-intentioned but can escalate or generate a forced marriage situation.
- Investigation/prosecution may bring to light "sensitive" issues (ex. sexual assault, LGBTQ-status discovery/disclosure, being in a premarital/extramarital relationship)
- Engaging or mediating with family and community systems may bring to light the fact victim has shared concerns about possibility of forced marriage with service providers or law enforcement

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Footprints: Factors and Interventions

- Vulnerability of client:
 - Impact on "honor" of family and community
 - Marriage as a means to smooth things over and divert attention
- Vulnerability of family members:
 - Marriage as a means of appeasing family disputes
 - Impact on existing domestic violence in the home/family culture and previous relationships

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Limitations of Tools/Interventions

- Reporting the crime
- Impact on family
- Structural analysis
 - Collectivist framework for some clients
 - Self-sufficiency or lack thereof for clients
- Communicating with abusers
- Limited resources
 - How forced marriage is considered versus domestic violence
 - Ex. Shelter access

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Contact Information

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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.preventforcedmarriage.org

Or contact: FMN@tahirih.org
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