

Lack of cultural understanding makes forced marriage victims wary of social services, study finds

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Victims of forced marriage and honour violence in the UK are hesitant to seek professional help because they are worried social workers will not understand their cultural differences, according to new research presented today at Royal Holloway University.

Researchers at Royal Holloway have called for social workers to receive mandatory training on sensitive issues surrounding different cultures and religious backgrounds, so that they understand that normal practices, such as involving family members, may not be the best solution in forced marriage cases.

The study, which analysed the forced marriage experiences of both men and women from Indian and Pakistani communities, is being presented at the University today (Thursday, 11 July), during the 15th annual UK Joint Social Work Education Conference.

"The forced marriage victims we interviewed recalled their experience as being the worst of their life", said one of the report's authors Stefan Brown, from the Department of Social Work at Royal Holloway. "Yet many victims are hesitant to seek professional help, either because they are unaware of the services available, they are worried non-Asians will not understand the cultural and familial pressures being placed on them or they are scared of the repercussions if they are caught.

"It is vital that social workers are pro-active in supporting victims and receive the necessary training so they understand the horror of what these young people are put through."

The report said that involving family members in discussions is normally considered good practice in the [social work](#) profession, but in [domestic violence](#) or [forced marriage](#) cases, this can instigate violent responses.

"Caution and confidentiality is essential, as well as cultural awareness. Forced marriage victims are subjected to emotional blackmail, [physical violence](#) and even [death threats](#) if it is thought they could damage the family's 'izzat', or honour. It is an issue that remains largely misunderstood, but one that causes misery for thousands of young people in the UK," Stefan added.

Provided by Royal Holloway, University of London

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