NOW I CAN BE MYSELF!

Cumulative Research Report

Exploratory Research Into the Experiences and Needs of Survivors/ Those At-Risk of Forced Marriage and Service Providers in the Greater Toronto Area

AUGUST 2017

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Submitted to:

I Do! Project
Toronto, On

Funded By:

The Laidlaw Foundation

LAIDLAW FOUNDATION

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING OF WATERLOO

i do! PROJECT

"Me and like my close friend our parents, or our moms to be specific, had a forced marriage so we know that, even though it's been a lot of years afterward, it still affects the kids and it affects the mom, like the woman in the marriage if the woman is forced to do it. And it's really funny because most people, you think of forced marriage as just happening in the moment, but even after 20 years or 40 years it could still really affect people."- Participant

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"I didn't go along with it. I rebelled. That's the biggest sin. To be a woman and try to have control over your own life."- Participant

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"Actually, one day I was riding on the bus, and I saw the ad for the I Do! Project. And uh, I was really, you know, having a terrible day – I was crying in public, on the bus, when I saw this. And I looked up at the advertisement and thought 'wow, that was me. This is my problem'. I didn't even have the words to articulate what circumstance I was in and I reached out and I phoned the number that I saw on the bus and I got in contact with the I Do! Project."- Participant

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" I don't have a big network. Whatever I am getting help with I am happy. When people say I'm not eligible and put me down when I feel stressful. I want them to give me a chance. I feel like I am nothing."- Participant

Executive Summary

This research aims to explore the experiences of survivor's of forced marriage and those at-risk as it pertains to service needs in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). To date, very little research has been able to capture the voices of survivor's of forced marriage and this is particularly true for research conducted in Ontario. Over the course of the last six months researchers have engaged in qualitative methods to uncover and document these voices and experiences in hopes of creating a larger dialogue around forced marriage and to strengthen services, policies and funding opportunities to build capacity in this field of support.

The I Do! Project engaged this research with the hopes to bring awareness and understanding to the issue of forced marriage. This work was funded by the Laidlaw Foundation and was done in collaboration with a research consultant, various community organizations and most importantly a survivor's advisory group. Forty research participants were included in this study, specifically 21 survivors of forced marriage, 8 youth imminently at-risk of forced marriage, and 11 service providers and community champions. Data was collected through interviews and focus groups that happened both in person and over the phone. All participants in this research accessed services or provide services in the GTA. The data collected was rich and textured and spoke to the complexities of the issue of forced marriage.

The research highlighted areas of strength and struggle for accessing needed support, the needs of survivors post their experience of forced marriage and an exploration of where they found the support needed to move forward in their lives. It was clear that there were things in the current system that deserved to be celebrated but also things that needed attention. Many of the experiences and thoughts from survivors and those at-risk mirrored that of service providers and champions.

When focusing the data and developing recommendations there was a desire for basic needs to be met, focusing on transitional housing as well as income. There were discussions on developing betters systems around continuums of care, paths of service and intake processes. Service navigation was another area of focus in terms of both better understanding what services are doing (particularly with informal support/services that are being offered outside of the guise or typical mandate of an organization) and ways to help survivor's engage in the right supports for their needs. However, some of the strongest areas of focus was the benefit and need to expand on peer support models, raise awareness

amongst those at-risk and the general public and to continue to develop and deliver responsive training for organizations, school officials, and policy makers. Lastly, in the spirit of developing more formal processes, exploring the development of a formal forced marriage entity that is funded to continue this work and support survivors with their various needs.

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Review of the Literature

Although the issue of forced marriage has gained more attention in recent years (Eskin Moses & Benjamin Russ, 2014, p. 33), it has yet to be explored with the thoroughness required to develop an adequate response that will fully meet the needs of victims. Two significant themes emerge from this analysis. First, there is a limited amount of information directly gathered from victims in Canada on their experience of forced marriage and the degree to which the services available are meeting their needs. Second, many of the challenges surrounding forced marriage can be traced to questions of divergent mindsets that are particularly challenging to negotiate because of the necessity to allow for a variety of beliefs (Siddiqui as cited in Gibillini, 2014, September 14) while protecting the rights of individuals to make choices for themselves (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 2; Baker, 2015, p. 10) within the context of the family system which creates an added layer of complexity.

Significance of the Issue

Although there are challenges in identifying the precise number of cases of forced marriages due to situations which are not communicated to others (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013; Gill & Anitha, 2009; Hester Chantler, Gangoli, Devgon, Sharma, Sandhya & Singleton, 2007 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 3), the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO) found that in Ontario, approximately 70 annual cases occur with females constituting ninety-two percent of those affected (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 3). In the U.K., 1485 individuals sought support in regards to issues pertaining to forced marriage in 2012, and in 2013 the total was 1302 according to a yearly study conducted by the Forced Marriage Unit (Baker, 2015, p. 3). However, a report published in the U.K. in 2009 indicates that the number of forced marriage situations is in the range of 5000 to 8000 (Kazimirski et al., 2009, p. 2), a significant discrepancy with other reports pointing to a high level of uncertainty surrounding the issue. During a two-year study in the United States of America, the number of confirmed or alleged instances of forced marriage was recorded as 3000 (Tahirih Justice Center, 2011 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 3). One of the challenges with statistics of these sorts is that without any additional comparative measures, it is difficult to assess the pervasiveness of the problem, if any improvements have arisen or whether the situation has deteriorated further. More detailed analysis of the figures could involve looking at the number of cases on a per capita basis and comparing the incidence of forced marriage across countries.

Theoretical Framework

The issue of forced marriage is primarily viewed as a form of "violence against women and girls" (Baker, 2015, p. 4) because these groups make up the largest population affected by the issue (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 3). At the same time, Anis et al. (2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 2) make the point that it is critical to distinguish the issue of forced marriage with the practice of arranged marriages, although the two are often confused. This suggests that an anti-discriminatory framework is very much at play in the analysis of the issue because efforts are being made to ensure that forced marriage is not stereotypically associated with individuals from particular backgrounds (Anitha & Gill, 2009 as cited in Baker, 2015, pp. 2-3; Eskind Moses & Benjamin Russ, 2014, p. 32) simply on account of the fact that arranged marriages are often seen as being more prevalent within certain groups (Khanum, 2008 as cited in Kazimirski et al., 2009, p. 20). However, it is important to note that while there is an emphasis on the need to balance a respect for differing ethnic practices while repudiating forced marriage (Gill & Van Engeland, 2014, p. 241), in certaindsor child in circles it is thought that arranged marriages are not significantly different from those that are imposed without a choice (Baker, 2015, p. 2; Eskind Moses & Benjamin Russ, 2014, p. 32). While those who maintain that there is a distinction between the two types of marriages argue that arranged marriages involve acceptance (Anitha & Gill, 2009 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 2), those who deny a difference contend that acceptance may be generated (Anitha & Gill, 2009 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 2), leading to questions as to whether it genuinely reflects the will of the party being married or if it is the product of an outside source (Philips & Dustin, 2004 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 2).

Survivors' Experiences

There are quite a number of contributing causes that lead to forced marriage, however, many of its sources can be traced to issues related to minimal prospects in terms of study, career pursuits and potential earnings (Baker, 2015, p. 6). In many instances, the purported goal of a forced marriage is the improvement of one's personal circumstances (Baker, 2015, p. 6). Some of the other explanations which have emerged involve curtailing substance use (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 6), curbing condemned interpersonal activities (Anis et al., 2013; Hester et al., 2007; Samad, 2010 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 6) and attempting to combat psychological difficulties (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 6). Preserving a family's reputation (Anis et al., 2013; Hester et al., 2007 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 6),

encouraging affiliations within cultures (Anitha & Gill, 2013; Hester et al., 2007; Husaini & Bhardwaj, 2010 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 6) and promoting economic stability through the control of assets (Anis et al., 2013; Hester et al., 2007 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 6) were also cited as relevant considerations in certain cases. Other explanations relate to accessing benefits through entry into a particular country (Anis et al., 2013; Hester, 2007 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 6), attempting to escape the negativity associated with a past marriage that was unsuccessful (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 6) and the view that marriage is a natural steppingstone to be taken at a particular point in one's life (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 6). The notion of avoiding uncertainty about the future also emerged as an explanatory reason with certain families perceiving someone that is not married upon completion of their studies to be very negative (Yasemin at cited in Sharp, 2009, p. 10).

Although forced marriage can occur for many reasons, it does not normally arise through a single act, but rather through a series of actions that are perpetrated over a prolonged timeframe (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 6). It frequently involves attempting to forcefully persuade an individual to marry another person by creating a form of psychological distress (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 6) through guilt or the use of stigma (Baker, 2015, p. 7). An individual may be told that a failure to comply will tarnish a family's standing in the community, will negatively affect the well-being of loved-ones or will adversely impact how a brother or sister is seen by others (Baker, 2015, p. 7).

Based on the U.K Government's justification for the changes implemented to its sponsorship laws which were grounded on the susceptibility of youth and resulted in the age requirement for the issuance of a visa to a partner being changed from 18 to 21 years of age (Baker, 2015, p. 14), it seems clear that age is seen as a significant factor in determining who is at greatest risk for involvement in forced marriage (Hester et al., 2007 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 14). However, some challenge this view, arguing that one's status as a male or female and significant pressures to fit the heterosexual norm are far more accurate predictors of one's vulnerability to forced marriage (Hester et al., 2007 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 14).

Survivors of forced marriage have, in certain cases, reported experiencing treatment that is similar to that of a person being trafficked (Eskind Moses & Benjamin Russ, 2014, p. 32). Individuals that have immigrated to the United States, for example, have indicated that upon re-entry to their homeland as travellers, they have been prevented from returning to the United States of America unless they accepted to enter into marriage with an individual that was chosen by their relatives (Eskind Moses & Benjamin Russ, 2014, p. 32). This often leads the individual to surrender to the will of the other party unless they

are able to avoid the end result by fleeing from the area (Eskind Moses & Benjamin Russ, 2014, p. 32).

In terms of those that victims are being compelled to marry, Sharp (2009, p. 9), identified that the most likely candidates were cousins of various degrees, males who are from the same geographic locations and individuals who are much more advanced in age. Victims can find themselves being pressured by members of their household or even more distant relatives in some cases (Sharp, 2009, p. 10). If support is available, it normally comes from brothers, a male the victim is currently in a relationship with, or a trusted non-family member (Sharp, 2009, pp. 10-11). The means employed to bring about compliance are reported as being the use of bodily and psychological harm, restrictions on mobility, confinement, withholding economic support, banishment to the land one emigrated from and the fear that failure to conform will lead to death (Sharp, 2009, p. 10).

Despite the mistreatment experienced, it was reported that fleeing from their oppressors was considered a final measure that would only be exercised if all other options had been exhausted (Sharp, 2009, p. 10). What enabled them to avoid reverting to evasion was a constant belief that the abuse would end and loved ones would cease to impose their will upon them (Sharp, 2009, p. 10). In the meantime, as a means of dealing with the situation, victims would use tactics to put off the marriage for an extended timeframe by remaining in school, leaving home, engaging in self-harm, trying to isolate one's self, using deception in hopes of being granted certain freedoms and seeking assistance to identify other potential courses of action (Sharp, 2009, pp. 10-11).

Services and Resources Available to Survivors

Based on research conducted by Bendriss (2008, p. 24), a study conducted in Toronto & Montreal, in consultation with frontline staff, it was determined that victims of forced marriage seek assistance primarily through organizations delivering social services. In the same report, those interviewed could not point to a single service provider that focused solely on providing expertise on issues surrounding forced marriage which explains the reason why victims find themselves seeking assistance through their interactions with staff in agencies aimed at helping women and temporary housing centers (Bendriss, 2008, p. 25). However, as one respondent noted, failing to have services specific to the issue of forced marriage results in staff, in many cases, being ill-equipped to tackle the challenges involved with the issue (Bendriss, 2008, p. 25).

In Ontario, one of the main organizations involved in advocacy on the issue is the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO). This organization has issued a number of publications on forced marriage including a toolkit, report, position paper on relevant legislation and a brochure (SALCO – Forced Marriage, n.d.). SALCO works in partnership with various initiatives to bring awareness of the services that are available for victims by posting those resources on their website (SALCO – Forced Marriage, n.d.). One of the primary sources through which services and support can be found is through the Network of Agencies Against Forced Marriages website. This site provides a list of service providers, their location and the type of assistance they offer for those that are facing difficulties related to forced marriage (Network of Agencies Against Forced Marriages, 2010). The Federal Government has also created a webpage with resources to serve those that are victims (Government of Canada, 2016, April 27). It includes a booklet created as part of the Family Violence Initiative, which includes information on various forms of abuse (Government of Canada, 2016, April 27). Although it is not exclusively specific to the issue of forced marriage, it provides advice on potential sources to turn to for assistance (Government of Canada, 2016, January 4).

Because there are few overarching policies within organizations or set procedures on how to tackle issues related to forced marriage, direct services often rely on informally gaining insights from colleagues and other agencies on how to proceed or using ad-hoc methods based on creative thinking (Bendriss, 2008, p. 27), although there are few details on what these measures include. Based on one respondent's explanation of how a particular situation was addressed, there seems to be considerable learning on-the-job that occurs or what might be described as an improvisational approach with a certain level of trial and error involved (Bendriss, 2008, p. 27).

The Survivor Experience

In some cases, survivors of forced marriage may internalize their emotions or engage in self-blame as a way of suppressing their thoughts without realizing that their discomfort with the situation is warranted (Bendriss, 2008, p. 24). They may feel like they dishonored their relatives (Sharp, 2009, p. 12), which can create feelings of doubt, requiring help to rebuild confidence and a sense of personal worth (Bendriss, 2008, p. 24). In certain cases, services to address alcohol or drug abuse may be needed as individuals may have developed a tendency to use substances as a means of coping with the pain of their experience (Sharp, 2009, p. 14). In cases when survivors are able to escape from the sources of distress, they may be left cut off from the social system to which they previously belonged which requires restoring their

individual personhood and a sense of where they fit in (Sharp, 2009, pp. 12-13). They must combat solitude and loneliness because of the risk that those who tormented them will uncover their whereabouts (Sharp, 2009, p. 13). This leads them to minimize social interactions because of the risk of being submitted once again to the conditions they fled (Sharp, 2009, p. 13). Thus, to respond to cases when victims are located, a plan of action should be in place that ensures their security (Sharp, 2009, p. 13). Some have also expressed that having a means to develop affiliations with others who share a similar heritage could be helpful to regain a sense of community (Sharp, 2009, p. 13).

Service Needs of Survivors

According to Anis et al. (2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 9), more supports are necessary in terms of shelter, which is largely due to the fact that forced marriage does not currently fall within the purview of spousal abuse which creates difficulties locating alternate spaces to reside while attempting to find a way out of a forced marriage or an impending situation which is likely to lead to it (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 9). Financial support is also said to be a challenge since those that have been forced into marriage are considered to be the economic responsibility of their parents or the person with whom they are married, rendering them ineligible in many cases to receive assistance (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, pp. 9-10). Additionally, efforts are particularly needed to address the shortage of therapeutic services, assistance geared to restoring psychological well being and preventing individuals from taking their own life in crisis situations (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 9).

Many believe that emphasis should be placed on enhancing knowledge among staff employed in social service agencies and increasing the number of individuals they are able to assist through additional staffing (Anis et al., 2013; Bendriss, 2008; Freeman & Klein, 2013; Harvey, 2013; Hester et al., 2007; Home Office, 2000; Larasi, Sumanta & Tweedale, 2014 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 15). Others advocate in favor of further developing organizations involved in directly delivering services for women, phone lines dedicated to offering support for those without any other source to turn to and initiatives aimed at bringing increased awareness about the mistreatment of women (Harvey, 2013; Hester et al., 2007 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 15). The idea of providing frontline staff with knowledge on the use of devices for evaluating susceptibility (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 15) has also been proposed as a necessary measure to combat forced marriage. Enhancing the ability of workers to identify the signs of forced marriage, especially among police officers, is also needed (Eskin Moses and Benjamin Russ, 2014, p. 33).

Through interviews with frontline staff, Bendriss (2008, p. 24) found that having a source of support that takes the time to genuinely understand what a person has experienced is most helpful to victims. This allows for the necessary rapport to be developed prior to working to repair the damage that has resulted from the circumstances they faced (Bendriss, 2008, p. 24). A non-stigmatizing approach, free of negative evaluations or any form of disapproval, was also emphasized as important to the relationship building process (Bendriss, 2008, p. 24). Clients need acceptance and a means to develop a sense of empowerment to be able to confront those that are imposing their will upon them (Bendriss, 2008, p. 24). They must be made aware of the freedoms they are entitled to in order to enable them to assert themselves when others act in unwanted ways and must be informed of the remedies that are available to assist when a problem arises (Bendriss, 2008, p. 24).

At a macro level, according to the Government of the United Kingdom, a higher level of emotional development and educational attainment which can result in reduced economic reliance serves as a means of limiting one's susceptibility to forced marriage (Chantler, Gangoli & Hester, 2009; Gangoli, McCarry & Razak, 2009 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 14). This suggests that advocacy in favor of policies that are aimed at promoting economic stability and reducing dropout rates among students would be beneficial as a preventative measure. In terms of assistance, measures in line with these aims may include services such as employment counselling, assertiveness training, confidence building sessions and greater access to school guidance counselors.

Barriers to Obtaining Support

One of the primary barriers to getting support is the fact that many of those that are subjected to forced marriage do not bring the experience to the attention of others (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 9). Because individuals are hesitant to make others aware that they have been forced into marriage, its occurrence often goes undetected by those working within social service agencies (Baker, 2015, p. 9). Part of the problem is that exercising influence over another person involves various degrees and it can be challenging to decipher when the exertion of influence is equal to compulsion (Harvey, 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 9). This suggests the need for explicit guidelines as to the boundaries between persuasion and coercive measures resulting in forced marriage (Baker, 2015, p. 9).

One of the few ways that forced marriages are discovered are when issues of domestic abuse arise

which lead victims to search for assistance (Baker, 2015, p. 9). One of the implications of this is that many of those that do not experience domestic abuse will go unnoticed, preventing those who are equipped to assist from providing support. Another issue is the fact that those who are victims of forced marriage do not see themselves as falling within the same category of those that have experienced domestic abuse (Gangoli, McCarry & Razak, 2009 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 9). This may lead them to avoid seeking assistance from service providers that specialize in confronting domestic issues, however, without services that are specifically aimed at addressing forced marriage this means that the needs of victims often go unaddressed (Anis et al., 2013; Bendriss, 2008; Tahirih Justice Center, 2011 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 9). There is often an insufficient level of expertise on issues of forced marriage within the ranks of service providers focused on addressing domestic abuse (Anis et al., 2013; Bendriss, 2008; Tahirih Justice Centre, 2011 as cited in Baker 2015, p. 9). Those that do seek assistance from these agencies and are unable to have their challenges adequately resolved experience reduced faith in the social service system which can lead them to avoid reaching out for help in the future as they may develop the impression that the situation is hopeless (Baker, 2015, p. 9). Some of the agencies specializing in services for women, which are often in the best position to assist victims of forced marriage, are also in many cases those that have the most difficulty securing funding and having their worth recognized (Larasi, Sumata & Tweedale, 2014 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 9). With little funding and limited recognition, it becomes all the more difficult to develop the training for staff and specific programs for clients that would be needed to significantly address the problem of forced marriage. Another barrier creating apprehensiveness among victims is the fear that one's legal standing within the country will be compromised and a requirement will be imposed to return to one's country of origin (Anis et al. 2013; Anitha et al., 2008; Gangoli & Chantler, 2009 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 9).

Researchers have found that, among those who are victims of forced marriage, it is, in many cases, frowned upon for the younger generation to question the beliefs or expectations of the older generation due to prevailing norms that exist among certain groups (Harvey, 2013; Hemmings & Khalifa, 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 10). As a result, victims reported having a desire to seek support from a person within a similar age group, but often thought it would have little effect on remedying the situation (Harvey, 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 10). A concern was also raised about difficulties young people may encounter accessing services because the approval of a parent was needed or on account of a minimum age restriction (Baker, 2015, p. 10). This is especially problematic because in certain cases the parent may be a source of distress associated with forced marriage and would have a vested interest in withholding consent. Moreover, mandatory age stipulations may pose as an added difficulty since those

that do not meet them may be among the most vulnerable. Another barrier is a lack of restrictions surrounding confidentiality within the shelter system and the fact that many do not allow entry around the clock which can compromise one's ability to find a secure area or escape from a volatile situation (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 10). Fear of having one's loved ones seen as dishonorable, of facing retaliation for a betrayal and of the consequences of seeking external aid are other factors that discourage victims from seeking help (Sharp, 2009, p. 12). The limited services offered in non-official languages, a lack of knowledge of available services and a desire to keep issues among relatives contained within the family also impact whether assistance is sought (Sharp, 2009, p. 12).

Current Policies of Relevance

Internationally, many shared agreements have been brought into force, through the United Nations (UN), that serve as a means to combat forced marriage (Baker, 2015, p. 10). As Baker (2015, p. 10) points out, these include the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages which can be traced back to 1962, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women which was introduced in 1979 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child which was adopted in 1989. According to the UN, there are situations in which the act of forced marriage is tantamount to "slavery" (United Nation, 1956 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 10) or can be categorized as "trafficking" (United Nations, 2000 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 10) which serves to highlight its severe condemnation of the practice. While Canada has adopted the 1979 and 1989 conventions, it has yet to commit to the statement from 1962 (Baker, 2015, p. 10).

A number of events which have transpired over the last number of years provide evidence that forced marriage is gaining more attention worldwide (Baker, 2015, p. 10). In 2014, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a document examining forced marriage in which it was argued that it constitutes an infringements of rights, occurs fundamentally as a result of societal divisions and is primarily motivated by gender-based considerations (OHCHR, 2014 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 10). Canada has shown its support in the recent efforts to combat the issue and bring greater awareness to the problem by acting as one of the sponsors of "a resolution on child, early and forced marriage at the Human Rights Council in September 2013" (OHCHR, 2014 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 10).

The Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act, which received Royal Assent in 2015, appears

to criminalize some of the behaviors surrounding forced marriage (Government of Canada – Department of Justice, 2016, April 29). It requires that both parties that are to be married demonstrate "free and enlightened consent" (Government of Canada – Department of Justice, 2016, April 29). It also stipulates that marriage cannot involve a person who is less than 16 years of age (Government of Canada – Department of Justice, 2016, April 29). However, because the legislation is quite recent, time will be needed to determine how well this measure serves to curtail forced marriage in Canada (Hester et al., 2007; Home Office, 2000 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 12). In the U.K., a number of policies were enacted including Forced Marriage Protection Orders as a means of addressing the problem (Baker, 2015, p. 12), but one of the challenges was that awareness of the measure was limited among victims making it difficult to invoke (Larasi, Sumanta & Tweedale, 2014 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 12). According to Baker (2015, p. 13), part of the emphasis placed on treating forced marriage as an offense stems from the decision taken in the Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence by the Council of Europe. This has led many European countries to adopt new laws criminalizing forced marriage (Baker, 2015, p. 13) with Australia also following suit (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 13).

Advocacy for Policy Change

Although the OHCHR has categorized forced marriage as an affront to one's rights as a person and there is considerable consensus on this claim, this has nevertheless not resulted in the type of positive shift for those seeking refuge from it as one may have anticipated (Baker, 2015, p. 11). When forced marriage was presented, in Canada, Australian and the U.K., as a reason for seeking refuge, in 120 instances it was overwhelmingly denied as a valid consideration for being granted asylum (Dauvergne & Millbank, 2000 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 10). The rationale for denying these claims was that forced marriage was not by definition an example of "persecution" (Dauvergne & Millbank, 2000 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 11) and consequently did not constitute an immediate threat to one's well being (Dauvergne & Millbank, 2000 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 11). There is clear disagreement on what precisely falls within the concept of persecution, suggesting a need for greater clarity on the matter as a means of bridging the gap between how forced marriage is perceived within international documents of relevance and how it is applied in practice by governments in assessing requests from refugees (Baker, 2015, p. 11).

Although there have been considerable efforts to pass laws prohibiting forced marriage as noted above

(Baker, 2015, p. 13; Government of Canada – Department of Justice, 2016, April 29), there is division on the question as to whether this is the most appropriate course of action (Baker, 2015, pp. 11-13). For example, SALCO argued against taking a criminal approach to the issue on the grounds that it may inhibit one from alerting authorities (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 11). The thought is that fear of the repercussions on loved ones may prevent victims from seeking redress because submitting relatives to the possibility of legal ramifications can be a difficult stance to take based on family dynamics and one's status as a dependent in many cases (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 11). The concern is that this could result in cases becoming more difficult to identify on account of the creation of a climate of fear (Eskind Moses & Benjamin Russ, 2014, p. 33). Another group of detractors of the criminal approach claim that the laws, which were in place prior to the implementation of the Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act (Government of Canada – Department of Justice, 2016, April 29), were adequate in themselves to prosecute actions that take place within a forced marriage (Baker, 2015, p. 13). Theorists who seek to avoid the legal route claim that additional emphasis should be placed on curtailing the occurrence of forced marriages (Wind-Cowie, Cheetham & Gregory, 2012 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 13) because charges are merely reactive and do little to alter the circumstances that allow them to take place (Gill & Anitha, 2009 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 13). Those in favor of the legal solution maintain that adverse consequences must be imposed on those found guilty of the act to serve as a preventative measure and as a moral remedy for those who suffer from its occurrence (Baker, 2015, p. 13). Finally, others take the position that a multi-pronged approach is needed and that a legal solution in itself is inadequate to account for the diversity of experiences among those who are victims of forced marriage (Larasi, Sumanta & Tweedale, 2014 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 13).

According to Baker (2015, p. 14), although some may be led to the conclusion that an appropriate means of guarding against forced marriage is through controls on entry into a country, this is not supported by the research. The inadequacy of this approach is attributable to the fact that forced marriage is not solely a problem with newcomers, but affects a variety of people and arises as a result of numerous contributing causes (Baker, 2015, p. 14). Consequently, a more effective approach must take into account the diversity among groups in order to tackle the array of factors giving rise to its occurrence among various populations (Anitha & Gill, 2009; Chantler, Gangoli & Hester, 2009 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 14). According to various theorists, dealing with the problem effectively requires taking an approach aimed at increasing public knowledge and proactively addressing instances of potential forced marriage in its initial stages (Anitha & Gill, 2009; Chantler, Gangoli & Hester, 2009 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 14). One point that remains rather uncontroversial is that forced marriage is a gender-

based attack that is primarily aimed at females which is a foundational premise that should serve as a starting point in devising methods to combat the problem (Baker, 2015, p. 14).

In line with achieving the recommendation above on the direction through which to address the issue, a number of proposals have been suggested. One involves increasing the level of consciousness about the issue across numerous groups including youth (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 15), college and university students (Freeman & Klein, 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 15) and individuals employed in positions of authority (Harvey, 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 15). Other analysts argue that the problem and the effect that measures are having must be understood more thoroughly through more information gathering (Hester, 2007) and additional time to survey those affected by forced marriage to assess the extent to which their needs are being met by service providers (Sumanta & Tweedale, 2014 as cited in Baker, p. 15). According to Anis et al. (2013), modifying the criterion of what constitutes "family violence to include forced marriage" (as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 15) would enable victims to more easily escape by providing easier access to alternative forms of shelter. Larasi, Sumanta & Tweedale (2014 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 15) argue that flexible conditions as well as enhanced safety measures should be provided to those who testify in legal cases as a means of providing victims of forced marriage with a greater sense of security in coming forward.

Knowledge Gaps and Limitations of the Current Literature

The main limitations of the current literature relate to a number of different issues pertaining to forced marriage. First, given how recently the Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act (Government of Canada – Department of Justice, 2016, April 29) has come into force, research must be conducted to assess the extent to which this mechanism is serving to prevent forced marriages from occurring. Answering this question will go a long way towards determining the next steps that ought to be taken.

Second, there is little research which has been found that provides a first hand perspective of the victims of forced marriage within Canada. Consequently, there is little direct research to assess how services in Canada are meeting the needs of victims. Although Bendriss's (2008) research, conducted with frontline staff, provides a glimpse of the challenges that were confronted by victims, because they were not directly interviewed, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the second hand accounts capture the lived experience. Even in another U.K. study that was specifically aimed at understanding the experience of survivors, out of the ten individuals identified as eligible to partake in the research only one

actually participated in the study (Sharp, 2009, p. 4). The nine other individuals interviewed were social service providers that were speaking on behalf of the victims (Sharp, 2009, p. 4).

Although the problem has garnered more interest in academic circles and within political discourse in recent years (Eskind Moses & Benjamin Russ, 2014, pp. 32-33), information from those that have faced forced marriage first hand, remains in short supply, especially in Canada. This is unfortunate, because understanding the experiences of those that have survived forced marriage can yield valuable details that can inform preemptive initiatives (Larasi, Sumanta & Tweedale, 2014 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 14), training on the identification of signs (Eskind Moses & Benjamin Russ, 2014, p. 33) and support services for victims to overcome its effects (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 15). This is all the more important since the issue is often experienced in secrecy, making it difficult to know how often it occurs (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013; Gill & Anitha, 2009; Hester Chantler, Gangoli, Devgon, Sharma, Sandhya & Singleton, 2007 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 3) and how it can best be addressed. In many ways, however, it does appear that some of the challenges surrounding forced marriage can be traced to ideological matters, especially when one reflects on its root causes as well as some of the barriers to seeking assistance. Evidently, adjudicating the balance between freedom of thought (Siddiqui as cited in Gibillini, 2014, September 14) and the obligation to respect one's capacity for autonomous decision-making (Anis et al., 2013 as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 2; Baker, 2015, p. 10) is no simple matter when family is an intervening factor within the equation. Assessing where the appropriate balance lies seems to require gaining a deeper understanding of the problem from the perspective of those that have suffered its impacts as a preliminary step to determining how best to move forward.

Research Methodology

In December 2015, the I Do! Project received funding from the Laidlaw Foundation to conduct research exploring the experiences and needs of survivors of forced marriage and those at-risk. At this time they hired an external research consultant to assist in the planning, organization and execution of the research project. Interview guides and questions as well as research ethics protocols were submitted to the Community Research Ethics Office in Waterloo Ontario. Ethics approval was granted in August of 2016. At the same time all members of the research team received TCPS2 training and received their certificated in research ethics.

Two advisory committees for the research project were developed, one consisting of survivors of forced marriage (three participants) and one with service providers/advocates (six participants). The decision to keep the advisory groups separate was to ensure that the voices of survivors were honoured and that they felt they had a safe space to provide their input, without having to navigate the power dynamics of potentially being on a committee with someone who had provided support to them. The advisory groups met on an as needed basis (approximately four times over the course of the project), typically at pivotal points in the research such as in developing the research instruments, navigating consent and protecting privacy, participant recruitment, and reviewing the research results. This project received mentorship from Dr. Ginette Lafrenière from the Wilfrid Laurier Faculty of Social Work who helped guide ethical research practice and worked with the team to ensure their research was of the utmost quality. In addition, this project was supported by a research assistant and a BSW student completing a practicum with Toronto Public Health.

Interviews and focus groups with survivors and those at-risk of forced marriage began in August of 2016. To recruit participants we primarily used a snowball sampling methodology supplemented with the development of an extensive network of social service providers throughout the GTA who helped to promote the opportunity to survivors and those at-risk. Service providers were given participant recruitment forms that acted as consents to contact. They could fill these forms out with potential participants, which allowed researchers to use the information given to contact the potential participants for involvement. We conducted 21 individual interviews with survivors of forced marriage, lasting 1-1.5 hours in length. The interviews were conducted either over the phone, or in person at a location of the participants choosing. In addition, one focus group with 8 exceptionally at-risk youth (ages 16 +) was completed. In total, 29 survivors/those at risk participated in this research.

Focus groups with service providers began in October of 2016. Two focus groups were conducted with service providers and champions from both community social services and municipal services doing work with survivors of forced marriage. Eleven service providers participated in this research. In total, this research included input and insights from 40 participants.

Research Results: Survivors/ At-Risk

Demographics

The selection criteria for participating in this research as a survivor of forced marriage required self- identification as a survivor with first hand experience, and they needed to have received support through social services in the GTA. For those at-risk they needed to self identify as such. Participants were primarily residing in the Toronto area, with several having travelled to other parts of Canada or the U.S.A to re-settle.

Figure 1: Time since last experience of forced marriage.

Further demographic questions explored the participants' time since their last experience of forced marriage, which resulted in a span time between one month and 23 years **(see figure 1).** No further demographic questions were explored due to the sensitive nature of identifying information with this vulnerable population and the heightened need for privacy for safety reasons.

The Experience of Forced Marriage

One of the defining experiences for participants post forced marriage what that they were left with the need to completely rebuild their lives and to often do it very quickly as their departure from their marriage was in the moment when they could escape:

"But because it was a rush I didn't have much time. It was an emergency. I only had that one-day chance to leave my home. So there wasn't time, it wasn't something that I planned it's just… 'oh I got a chance today, let me leave the country.' I left everything. I had money, I had everything but I left everything."- Participant

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Often they had no home, income and were experiencing shame and guilt, while also having their support network severed or impacted severely. With this, participants talked about experiencing significant mental health issues, feeling extremely stressed to provide for themselves, and in some cases their families, and meet their basic needs. Sometimes all of this was done in a country they were not familiar with and did not speak the language of.

For one participant, this overwhelming experience was summarized:

"Even at the stage at that point where I am thinking you know, 'what is going to help me out of this?' I guess lacking a direction because I have so many problems all at the same time and my life has been totally upheaved for me. Every aspect of my life was rearranged by other people."- Participant

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Gender roles, not being able to name their experience, family and the feeling of isolation were popular themes when participants talked about their experience. These themes are explored in more detail in the section below.

Gender Roles

It is important to note that many of the participants in this research identified as female and grew up in a value system that embraced traditional gender roles and had clear rules and expectations of women. Regardless of their exit from the forced marriage these values still played a role in their everyday lives and how they perceive themselves and how they felt others perceive them.

There is a strong belief in many of the communities and cultures that participants came from that the role of women was to serve men, be abiding and complacent:

"They expected me to follow whatever the family said. I'm a woman and they think that women don't have any choices in their lives. We're just here to serve men and if we don't agree to go along with that then we're no use to them. We don't exist anymore. Because we didn't do what is our only purpose to our existence. Even a lot of women believe that about themselves."- Participant

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Because of the gender norms shaping their upbringing and their rejection of these norms, several participants were concerned about how others perceived them:

"No. I wanted to learn. I'm scared of my people. Because if people from my country know, they will say 'Why is she living alone?' 'Why didn't she stay with her husband?' People try to judge. They don't want to understand my situation. I need good friends. I need to find activities."- Participant

"I remember there was a time in my life where, even now, you know, making my efforts to move out of the house and be independent and live my own life. And I've always been very discouraged in that because in my culture, in my tradition, you don't move out 'til you're married. You live alone, that is frowned upon, especially as a young woman."- Participant

Challenging these perceptions meant embracing their independence. It also meant that for some women they had more to learn and explore in order to meet their basic needs:

"Um, because I didn't really have the skills to do that, because essentially a lifestyle was being provided to me by the male members of the community and so I never had those kind of expectations on me, to go and provide housing for myself. So I wouldn't even really know where to begin. The thought never occurred to me that I would be living on my own as a young woman, because that is not what women do where I come from."
- Participant

"I learned so much skills in terms of being independent. Because I know that that wasn't really something that I was taught when I was younger, it was more of you know, being a good housewife and being a mother. So like learning about, you know investments, or like going shopping or doing like, the most basic things… taking the bus- I learned that all. "- Participant

While a lot of forced marriage survivors who speak out identify as female, it is important to recognize that males and trans folk also experience this and that they too may be forced into the marriage. One participant talked about the typical gender norm in his community of women being 'married off' happening to him and the struggle that brought in terms of sharing his experience:

"So the issues that I was facing is… Well the biggest was more that was not the norm for guys in our culture. I didn't came across anybody who was getting engaged at 17 or 18. And so I didn't know how to face with my peers. How to tell my friends, how to tell anybody at school that I'm going through this experience."
- Participant

This same participant talked about how typical gender roles in his culture and the 'male script' when it comes to forced marriage and how his situation flipped that script:

"Yeah. And also like their role in the family is different right, we are normally as a man, we are considered more of a bad guy, right? They are the ones who are abusive, it's not the other way around, or the forced marriages are more taken as the girl is forced into the marriage, that's the story that we used to hear all along. It's not the other way around that the guy is forced into a marriage."- Participant

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Another participant talked about the 'boy and girl' rhetoric in forced marriage conversations and the need to expand beyond this narrative to be more inclusive to men who experience forced marriage:

"And to add onto the girls and boys thing, I feel like we shouldn't do that because it kinda creates a barrier, like a emotional barrier plus a physical... but mostly an emotional barrier, because it creates like 'Oh that's a girl thing. This is a guy thing.' Yeah, like and when we add – this is everybody's thing."- Participant

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Naming the Issue

Being able to understand their situation and putting a name to what they were experiencing was something participants talked about at length. For many of the participants, whether they escaped a forced marriage 20 years ago, when this issue was considered even more underground, or just months prior to participating in this research, it was clear that the term forced marriage is still a new concept for participants and service providers alike:

"I needed access to community resources to help me understand what had taken place. In 2006, forced marriage was not something that was really talked about in Canada. I didn't even actually know that that was what I had experienced."- Participant

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Participants talked about not having the terminology or vocabulary to express their situations:

"Okay, I would say… that if it had not been for the I Do! Project, I would have never recovered from this situation. Because I would have no had access to the educational materials, to help me see what was really going on and what the real social problems were. And that was a big part of my struggle. I did not know how to dig myself out of this issue."- Participant

"It was just the isolation and without anyone to really talk to about this problem that I was having, and I didn't even have a vocabulary to describe what I was going through."- Participant

At the time of their forced marriage several participants didn't even realize that forced marriage was a 'thing':

"When it was happening, no, I never even knew that what I was experiencing was 'something', I didn't know that like this pressure, this kind of, like, mentality among certain communities was a thing."- Participant

"I mean, yeah I had friends but… I didn't really open up to them and tell them that, you know, here's my situation… I'm being forced. Like I wouldn't even know, I wouldn't even be able to apply the term ' forced' to it."- Participant

For some it took time and exposure to others stories that made it clear that what they had experienced was also forced marriage:

"I'd heard much worse stories about like, so I always kinda discounted the experience but then later on when I came into this work, in the social sector, and I started to acknowledge like this was a thing, it was very reflective for me and that's kind of when I took it back to my mother in particular and I said 'this is not okay and I was too young'."- Participant

"Uh, she was kind of giving her experience of what happened with her and I kind of related with her, like everything she was saying about how, like, honour and how, like, the family were like gonna disgrace her if she was gonna do something, and it just, like, it kind of brought to life that that was not an okay situation to be in."- Participant

Several participants credited the efforts of social service providers for helping them to label their experience as a forced marriage:

"My personal level of awareness …I had no awareness of what forced marriage was, because it'd never really been described or experienced in kind of a mainstream way. I was told by the agency after I shared what had happened to me. I didn't believe it was forced marriage because I didn't know and one of the first statements that was made to me was that it was a breach of my human rights."- Participant

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Not having this terminology or being able to define and explain their experience often led to confusion and misunderstanding of the situation, which was a barrier to receiving help:

" Well, it's a very isolating issue that not a lot of people understand."- Participant

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"In the initial stages, when I didn't have the education on this, I faced a real barrier in reaching out for services."- Participant

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"I was very limited by my ability to communicate the type of issue that I was experiencing. So, I was worried that I might not get through to this person on the other end of the line what my problem was."- Participant

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Family

Family was a complicated experience for participants. Some participants talked about still maintaining relationships with brothers and sisters and extended family (aunts and uncles). Sometimes forced marriages happened outside of the family, but the abusive nature of the relationship did not allow for family contact. Still others were estranged or had been excommunicated from their family, friends and their greater community.

Parents tended to be the most complicated family relationship, as they were often the ones providing the most pressure around getting married. This pressure was also linked to the greater communities

expectations of their parents to marry their child off. Participants talked about parents being manipulative, pressuring and sometimes threatening:

"If you do this, we're gonna get, like, really disappointed, like, nobody in the family will talk to you. Yeah, like, they just, like, really discouraged me to be with him and then I started seeing, like, what their standards were."- Participant

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"A lot of my identity was crushed in order to appease this person and my family. And I think that it was there was kinda like two pulls. One was like it was occurring in secrecy. I felt a lot of pressure. I felt a lot of very low self-esteem because of the way that my mother was interacting with me. "- Participant

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"They are like doing it very nicely in the loving fashion, that you don't know how to rebel. It's like your mom is like, putting an arm around you and saying that 'no this is very good for you, and you have to do this', it's like you don't know how to react."- Participant

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There was a common experience of having disappointed family members because of their decision to leave the marriage, divorce, or in one case, their sexual orientation. This weighed into the complicated family dynamics experienced by some participants:

"Of course there is this feeling of not having succeeded at something they had set out for me. The other is that my life is very different and it is hard for them to actually understand how it is different."- Participant

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One participant went as far as to suggest that survivors avoid their immediate family altogether:

"But um, I think the tricky part about asking your community members, or at least that are in your family circle for help is that they're not going to help you…That's all they know, is how to oppress or weaken the women, to keep her in the marriage or make them not look bad. The biggest advice is don't go do your immediate family."- Participant

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Some participants talked about being excommunicated from their families and/or larger communities because of their decision to escape their forced marriage. For some, their greater cultural or religious community led this excommunication, but for others their immediate family led it:

"I haven't really talked to any of my relatives since then. They look down on me now because I didn't do what the family told me to. They're angry and they say they don't want anything to do with me because I'm nothing to them now. I don't exist anymore as far as they're concerned."- Participant

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Several participants talked about family members who tried to bridge them with their family. Often it was found that this was a trying position for that family member to be in. For one participant, a relationship with her aunt was her only family connection but she found that her parents were actively trying to severe this relationship:

"For example my parents have said mean things that were untrue about me to her, and that made her think bad things, and then, her amount of support for me would decrease."- Participant

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Another participant talked about a step-grandfather who lived outside of their religion:

"I speak to my grandfather about this, my step-grandfather, because he also knows the religious community I was born in and how fanatical it is. And he is sympathetic towards me, and he tries to mediate between my parents and I on it."- Participant

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While some participants had very negative family situations, some forced marriages were not because of family pressure or the whole family may not have been supportive of the forced marriage, and often these participants were able to lean on siblings and other relatives to step in and support them:

"And my brothers and sisters that are back home, that have been really support. Not a lot of brothers and sisters support their sister being gay and what not."- Participant

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Isolation

Isolation was a shared experience among participants. In many cases, participants were left with very few supports in their lives, a large sense of guilt and shame for their decision to leave their forced marriage and finding peers to relate to that shared similar experiences was difficult. Sometimes this isolation can come from friends and family being in a different country, sometimes it was due to excommunication and sometimes it was just the overwhelming aspect of the situation causing participants to shut down and recluse for their own protection. One participant quoted isolation as one of the hardest parts of her experience:

"I would just, it is the isolation and without anyone to really talk to about this problem that I was having."
- Participant

Sometimes the feelings of isolation were cemented in the visible aspect of cultural differences:

"I'm an immigrant, I'm a person of Colour, and whenever I went outside I'd be looked at. I wear a hijab. Me and my girls would just be looked at."- Participant

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Often their experience resulted in broken friendships, feelings of betrayal and the realization that they will likely not have these supports back in their lives for some time, if ever:

"Well, trying to go back to my community - that's something I don't think that's gonna happen, for the next 20 years at least. So I don't think I will go back to my community. "- Participant

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In the absence of family and with severed relationships, forming new friendships was crucial for participants. Often this broke the feelings of isolation, particularly in the case of being able to engage with peers:

" It's a journey for every woman and girl, like, it's not like they just wake up and get out of it. So, like, they face a lot of difficulties like, in terms of not having their family around. Some people still have their family, but like, some people are all alone, so like, they still need like, you know, a friend."- Participant

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"You know when we're sharing our experiences there is another person that really does validate to that individual that you're not alone, and that to know, this is not your fault."- Participant

Embracing Independence

One of the most celebrated outcomes of escaping forced marriage for participants was being independent and in control of their own lives. The intensity of embracing and exercising their independence most definitely was experienced on a continuum and specific to each participant, most of the participants talked about key moments in their lives where they were able to make their own decisions and follow their own journey and the liberating quality related to that. Participants sometimes framed this independence in a need to survive:

"I am stronger now because I see that many people will not help me. I have to learn how to stand by myself." - Participant

"I developed it after all these things. Because I had no one to help me so I had to develop it to survive. I didn't have any choice. I had only myself to rely on. No one in my family was there to support me. That's what you do. You develop what you need to survive, or else you won't."- Participant

"To be strong and hope for the best. Because probably nobody is going to help you. You will have to save your own life, if you can."- Participant

Other participants contributed their independence to just believing in themselves:

" Mmm, probably in my confidence. That, maybe that, I believe in myself that I can do certain things. Yeah! That! Believing in myself! "- Participant

"My most significant strengths? I guess realizing that I don't have to conform to what they want, like, just realizing that I can be who I want to be."- Participant

Related to independence, participants talked about recognizing things that were wrong and being self-advocates and encouraging others to as well:

" Well, I don't know if this should count as skill but I've learned to speak out, like no matter the situation, I've learned to say that, 'what is wrong is wrong, that I need to report it'. "- Participant

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"I would ask all the women to speak up for themselves. No matter what kind of situation they are living in, there is always a solution. You can always get out of it. And yeah, that is the one thing that I would love to change. "- Participant

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"Coming back from that experience, despite having ups and downs, I stand up more strongly about my opinion. And I'm able to, sometimes when I feel something isn't right, I'll dispute it and I will stand my ground. "- Participant

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While for some embracing independence came naturally, others continued to work on it everyday:

"I'm still experiencing a lot of steps. I am still making friends. I am still meeting people. Still making some changes. "- Participant

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"Life is full of lessons so everyday I am learning everyday, every single day, and I am beginning to learn for sure. "- Participant

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Participants Needs Post Forced Marriage

Participants talked about a wide diversity of needs post their experience with forced marriage. Typically these needs focused on both physical needs as well as emotional/social and spiritual needs. One participant summed this up:

" Uhh.. basically everything. All of my physical needs such as housing, food and clothing. Anything that I needed to look after my physical needs I needed support with. I also needed emotional, psychological and spiritual support. Along with, um, financial support as well."- Participant

Some of the needs of participants included housing, income, status, IDs, international support, social inclusion, mental health support, and long-term support. However, regardless of the participants support needs, they needed to be validated. Participants desired to be believed and not questioned and urged service providers to believe victims:

"I would change people's awareness and acceptance. The only things that will make a difference are people knowing this is happening and that people aren't just making up weird stories. They also need to know how to help people, especially police and counsellors and anyone who has the job of helping people. If they don't believe the person and help them then that person will probably never try to get help again. That will be the end of their life. They could be dead. Or they could be stuck. Either way they won't have a life. "- Participant

Physical Needs

Housing

Housing was the most common concern among participants. In most cases, participants were fleeing their forced marriage and left everything, including their money behind. To further complicate things they often found themselves fleeing to a new city or even country. With little money they often utilized women's, youth, and family shelters during their search for more permanent housing. Some participants were successful obtaining transitional housing or getting subsidized housing whereas others found themselves in apartments they could not afford or sharing overcrowded accommodations.

There was a lot of pressure felt to find housing and so the need for priority housing and/or housing specifically for survivors was a common rhetoric among participants. Participants talked about their struggles finding housing:

"My counsellor was forcing me to leave the shelter. Right away I started to look for an apartment. No one would give me an apartment because they said we were with no status, because you're new. They didn't like you are on OW. They say, 'you're on OW. Don't call us again!'"- Participant

Often it took participants between four months and a year to find housing in the community, and a six-year wait for subsidized housing. One participant shared:

"I felt like I'm here, it's home. Yeah. But it took very long. Took 10 months almost, for me to get the housing." - Participant

Participants experienced barriers around housing that were linked to lack of employment or income, feeling unknowledgeable about the rental process and the difficulty in finding affordable housing in the GTA. Economic strain and housing affordability were described as the hardest barrier to overcome and because of the cost of housing and barriers to obtaining it, one participant talked about 'shelter hoping' in order to survive:

" Living in the shelters, I think that would be my main uh, challenge because I couldn't find housing that was affordable in the City and um getting subsidized housing was very difficult. I was at my first shelter for a few months. But because of the type of shelter it is, for emergency, I couldn't stay there for so long, so I was kind of forced to go to another shelter to stay there a bit longer. I was always worried that maybe within a year I won't find permanent housing."- Participant

"I mean thankfully I was able to get housing much quicker but for a lot of ladies who are not able to get, you know, special priority or something. Unless you can afford a place, which usually is not the case because a lot of girls, they didn't really have any money or clothes or anything, just come here themselves and that's usually troublesome. I know some girls would go to shelter to shelter and that creates so much stress…" - Participant

Participants felt vulnerable when it came to making decisions about housing, a number of participants shared that this was something they had never done before. It was clear there were barriers in terms of understanding their rights as tenants and the rental market, thus making them increasingly vulnerable to exploitive housing situations:

"I used craigslist to help myself find housing. I did this out of my own need to find a place to live. Um, not the most brilliant strategy but it did result in a roof over my head, and it was out of desperation I was doing this. I wish I had more time and less pressure to find a place to live. I had no idea that you could negotiate a price for rent. I had never paid rent before in my life and I had no idea, really what rent in Toronto should be, so I kind of feel like I didn't get a very good deal. I was so desperate to take something, I just took whatever I could find and I had to make very snap decisions which I probably wouldn't have made in the same way if I had more time to think about it and less stress. "- Participant

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Participants felt that the current system did not meet the needs of women escaping forced marriage, or more generally experienced domestic violence. One participant called for more temporary housing to allow women time to find housing, particularly in her situation where she had no experience doing so:

"Women that faced domestic abuse should have more temporary housing available, until they can stand on their own two feet instead of just giving them a period of time to be in a shelter and then them to find a place on their own, which is difficult. I was a housewife. I never worked. I was raising my young children. I didn't even know how I would start to get a house or anything like that."- Participant

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A number of participants talked about ending up in housing that was far too expensive for their means, which lead to economic hardship and a precarious housing situation:

"I feel like that's where it started, we settled in a apartment but no furniture with high rent. My rent was $1250. Um I didn't have any income, any job, anything. I was expected to pay rent after next month. Mentally I was very depressed because I was financially struggling."- Participant

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Accessing community or subsidized housing was another barrier for some women. One participant shared that she was successful in getting priority status on the housing list and was able to move into a unit, whereas others came into barriers to being put on the priority list:

" I would change the housing system, because they said I wasn't allowed to be housed because my husband lived abroad, which was very unfair. Yeah I would change that, because I came out of a very very terrible alcoholic and abusive relationship. I would give priority to everybody that's abused, not somebody who lives here or doesn't live here."- Participant

Another participant was not able to access priority housing because there was no proof her ex-husband lived in Canada:

"They told me I wasn't allowed to be - I don't have priority for housing because there's no proof of my ex-husband lived in Canada. So yeah, I would change that - that was a struggle."- Participant

And another participant shared this struggle, again with her abuse happening outside of Canada:

" … because it was mostly for people who had problems in Canada. They don't really consider abuse, if you're outside of Canada, so yeah. "- Participant

Feeling safe and secure was another area of concern among participants when it came to housing. It was important for participants to feel like they could trust where they were staying and felt safe there, whether it was at a shelter, in transitional housing or their own market rental. Because of the trauma of their experience the feeling of safety became that much more important and with every move a participant made they had to start the process of learning to trust and feel secure all over again. One participant stated:

"And also letting people stay for a longer period of time because not everybody can leave, like right away or after like two months, because then they would just be going to somewhere else where they're not familiar with, and it would have to start again to kind of like feel like they can trust the place, or feel secure or feel safe."- Participant

Food

Food was an area of focus in terms of needs, particularly for participants where were unfamiliar with food banks and those whose cost of housing was particularly high relative to their income. One participant shared:

"I was in a very desperate situation for food, actually. And, I had to tell- I was very ashamed to tell the other people who I was living with in the house, that I didn't have any food, and I could not believe that my own family would allow me to be in that situation, and I actually at one point had to call in the people who were carrying out the abuse of forced marriage through my religious community to bring me food."- Participant

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Participants talked about the importance of food banks. One participant shared:

"There's a food bank at Bellamy Road and Bermorten Drive. They gave me food for me and my son every week."- Participant

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Financial Needs

Some participants were able to receive Ontario Works as a source of income. However this amount rarely covered their basic needs:

"There isn't enough from OW to support myself and my son. They only give me two-thirds of my rent so I have to pay all my food money for rent. We slept for two weeks on the floor because we didn't have any furniture at all."- Participant

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As such there was a further emphasis on gaining employment to help support themselves and their families. Employment was an area that most participants felt they needed assistance with. For some, in gaining employment they faced significant barriers around language, childcare, housing and identification. For others, the struggle came from having never been employed before or they were re-

entering the workforce after a period of time away. One participant talked about trying to balance the upheaval of their whole lives with the need and pressure to gain employment:

"So, trying to worry about putting yourself together for a job interview when you have this ongoing abuse, is like, too much, all of it, at the same time."- Participant

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Another experienced barrier to work was not having status. One participant shared:

"Newcomer always needs more support than others. Some people are on OW a long time and they never push them to go for work, but they push newcomers very hard. No one would register me for work, not even the YWCA. OW says I have to work and refugee hearing people say I have to work, but no one will give me work because the numbers on my SIN card show that I don't have status."- Participant

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Status & International Support

Several participants talked about their need to get status in Canada, particularly in the context of being able to get a job, medical help, school, find housing and in some cases to be eligible for social service support. One participant talked about needing all of these things so she can start her life again:

"I don't have anything. I don't have a status. I don't have anything. So I need first to form those things. First I need to get my status here first, because without that, I was suffering a lot. I can't work. I can't do stuff. If I want to study, I can't study because for every single thing they're asking for the status, for driving, for every single thing, wherever you go they're asking for the status. Even for medical health, like I had so many things going on with my body and I have to pay. It's so important to me, so if I'm gonna get that, then I can start my life again,"- Participant

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Eligibility was a significant barrier to accessing needed support and exploring opportunities for stability. For one participant it became a barrier for her children as well:

"Sometimes when people say I'm not eligible for things because I'm new in Canada. New people come here and they have nothing and they cannot get anything because they are not citizens. Even the children can't go to play because they aren't eligible."- Participant

In another interview, a participant pleaded to receive status so that she can prove her worth in Canada:

"I needed support from Canada to help me live in Canada. I need to prove how strong I am and I want to show how qualified I am. I want to give my son a good future. I need status in Canada."- Participant

Identification was another common barrier, may of the participants experiencing ID issues left their IDs behind when they fled, and this caused barriers in their journey to stability. One participant shared:

"I think because I left before I had any of my documents, any of my IDs when I left my husband. I think my, the biggest challenge I faced was to get those IDs. All of those IDs came to his address, and it's hard because nobody is going to allow you to change your address unless you can show them a Canadian ID. And, without having ID, which happens to a lot of women even if they have been in Canada for a while, or they may have grown up here, they often might not have IDs, so not having IDs is a common barrier that I've kind of faced in accessing services, and that can be very challenging."- Participant

A number of participants in this research talked about either coming from another country or their forced marriage happening in a country either than Canada and the need for stronger international aid for both helping women to escape their forced marriage as well as returning to Canada. One participant talked about her experience in Pakistan:

"... like this all happened while I was in Pakistan. So over there, you hardly have any agencies that can protect you."- Participant

Long Term Support

Another area of need that came up in our focus group for at-risk girls was the long terms impact of forced marriage and the need for long term support that encompassed the needs of families:

"Me and like my close friend our parents, or our moms to be specific, had a forced marriage so we know that, even though it's been a lot of years afterward, it still affects the kids and it affects the mom, like the woman in the marriage if the woman is forced to do it. And it's really funny because most people, you think of forced marriage as just happening in the moment, but even after 20 years or 40 years it could still really affect people."- Participant

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With the need for long terms supports several participants, whose experience of forced marriage was 20+ years ago, shared that they would always have the fear and feeling that it could happen again:

"They have to know that what you're going through isn't like a phase and it's not going to be over. It's going to haunt you even if you, like, get over it. Like even if they stop you to the forced marriage it's still going, you're still going be scared 'like what if it happens again'."- Participant

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Emotional/ Social Needs

When it came to participants talking about emotional/social needs they talked about their struggle with their experience not being validated, isolation because of things like language barriers, mental health support and peers to help them feel supported and capable.

One of the large areas for survivors, that was an experience, need and a barrier to accessing services was the very legitimate fear that the people and organizations they were trying to access help from would not understand or believe their experience. This inhibited some participants from reaching out for supports as freely. One participant quoted:

"Like before going out to contacting any agencies or finding the options out there, uh who can I talk to. The resistance to talk to an agency is always … you don't think that they understand your situation very well or your culture very well or your lay of the land very well. Right? It's like more you're talking to a professional." - Participant

It was very important for participants to have their experience validated by the people at the services they were accessing:

" I think the first thing that I needed was probably shelter, and just to be validated that what was happening was disturbing."- Participant

Another area of concern for some participants was language barriers. Particularly how this affected their ability to communicate their experience and needs. One participant talked about the need for interpreters:

"To interpret for them and what not. So, language barriers are not a problem."- Participant

Another desire would be for agencies to be able to speak many different languages in the moment when they call:

" Um… More people who could speak your language. Not family members, like others. Places where people speak two languages, three languages like you could call already, you could speak your language for example. If you got the shelter's number, if you call then you should… if you don't know that language, you should speak your language and they should find someone or they should have somebody there to speak with you. Not to read or to be afraid, like if I call I can't speak and I can't get help."- Participant

Mental Health Support

Participants also talked about the need for mental health support, therapy and counselling. This support was felt to be a catalyst to finding and keeping housing, obtaining employment and in re-establishing their lives after their experience of forced marriage. Some participants talked about barriers to finding affordable mental health support in Toronto. This was particularly true after leaving the shelter because shelters often had built in mental health supports participants could access.

Beyond being able to just find accessible counselling there were also concerns over counsellors or therapists not understanding the context around forced marriage and the experience and participants seeking out specific therapies. Some of these types of therapy talked about included: feminist, trauma based, self-knowledge, and cognitively able.

Social Support

Throughout the interviews participants talked about the importance of and impact that peers had on their journey toward recovery from forced marriage. Participants talked about peers helping them navigate through the system, supporting them by validating their experience, helping them with the emotional impact of the forced marriage, being someone to advocate by their side and filling a social need. One participant summed up her need for this:

"I think that self-knowledge therapy is really important. And then… building a community and having someone, like a large support system. For me it's important 'cause I'm like a social butterfly kind of being, so for me having different communities and friend support systems is very important."- Participant

---

It was important for participants to have someone to talk to and get advice from about if they are doing the right thing and someone to listen. It was important for one participant for their social support to have a shared experience of forced marriage:

"It's just uh… somebody to talk to that if I am doing the right thing, um… somebody to support me emotionally um… somebody who have been through the same thing or understood what I have been through or just to listen to me."- Participant

One participant, merely just wanted to feel less alone:

"Hope that things would get better, uh, what's the word - friends. (sigh) "- Participant

Understanding the Current System of Support

Formal Supports Accessed

This research explored the current system of support in the GTA for survivors of forced marriage. Participants were asked about formal and informal support they received post their experience of forced marriage. Formal supports were defined as supports from organizations/agencies. Whereas informal supports were defined as being part of the participants social network. It became quickly evident that a variety of different services were used, all of which fit into the larger categories of: Emergency shelter, counselling and support, legal services, helpline and online resources and immigration, settlement and newcomer support services **(see Figure 2).**

Figure 2: Accessed service areas.

The following figures depict those services to which participants stated they have accessed support from in each of these larger categories.

Emergency Shelters

When talking about accessing shelter it was clear that many different resources were used given the situation and age of the participant at the time of the forced marriage (**see Figure 3**). The most prevalent shelter used was Sandgate Women's Shelter. In some situations this was the first shelter participant's accessed:

"Sandgate shelter for abused women. That's the one that helped me to stay, as soon as I landed in Canada that's where I went." - Participant

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However, some participants referenced Sandgate Women's Shelter as not being their first shelter experience post forced marriage, but rather a place the participant later discovered or was referred to from other shelters.

Figure 3: Emergency shelter supports accessed.

Counselling and Support

When accessing counselling and support there were a wide range of services needed and usedto help participants with the realities of their experience. For those participants who stated their experience of forced marriage had been three years or less, the most likely services mentioned included emergency supports, transportation, more general support focused on basic needs as well as Ontario Works. For those whose experience of forced marriage was between four and ten years a larger focus was on counselling as most of their immediate basic needs were being more continually met by this point (**see Figure 4).**

Figure 4: Counselling and supports accessed.

Legal Services

Participants talked about having legal needs in a number of interviews. It was quickly apparent that these needs were very diverse and individually specific (**see Figure 5**). For some it was a matter of accessing legal services to void the marriage, or obtain custody. For others they were accessing legal support around issues of citizenship and immigration, or refugee status. Major factors influencing these needs were if participants escaped their forced marriage by coming to Canada, the marriage happening outside of Canada and where there were children or assets involved. Participants also talked about needing legal help inside and outside of Canada, for example in the country where the forced marriage occurred or was set to (or did) occur.

Figure 5: Legal services accessed.

Helpline and Online Resources

Participants talked about using helplines and online resources as a formal support (**see Figure 6**). This was largely brought up when participants talked about their need to discover/better understand what they were experiencing and where to find support. These resources were used both prior to coming to Canada as well as in Canada. Several participants talked about the importance of the Internet and websites in finding support prior to leaving their current country.

Figure 6: Helpline and online resources accessed.

Immigration, Settlement and Newcomer Support Services

Participants talked about utilizing immigration, settlement and newcomer support services at various stages of their journey, from Canadian Embassy Offices in other countries, to the point of being in the airport and landing in the country, to looking for support and to develop a sense of community (**see Figure 7**). These services provided an abundance of support for participants and in some cases responded to specific needs, such as ESL classes, or assisted in multiple needs more broadly:

"English learning. The ESL classes. People's behaviour. I am stronger now because I see that many people will not help me. I have to learn how to stand by myself."- Participant

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" Hmm. Like what COSTI did for me. Setting up my life. I don't know anything around here. These guys literally explained stuff to us, they gave us money, they opened up bank accounts for us, they took us to the place for health cards. They literally did all the settling that we were supposed to do for us. So, without them I don't think I would really get my life together."- Participant

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Figure 7: Immigration, settlement, and newcomer support services accessed.

Informal Supports

Participants were asked what sort of informal supports they received. There were some key areas of informal support that came from their answers, which included: Friends, personal advocates, peers, faith leaders and family members. Unlike formal supports, informal supports appeared to be very specific to the participant, while some had support from family members, others had be excommunicated from all their family or had not spoken to them in some time. (**see Figure 8**)

Some participants had positive relationships with faith leaders, others feared that talking to a person of their faith would lead back to their families. One interesting area of mention was the role of personal advocates, they were usually people in positions of authority or highly skilled advocates around forced marriage. In one case, a participant talked of a group of professors were important informal supports:

"The first time, you know all the professors coming together to help me. I come from a culture that told me not to trust anybody but your own family. Um… So it was weird. I felt like it was a blessing."- Participant

Most importantly, participants referenced the life changing and supportive role that peers played. Discovering people with shared experience was very important to participants, and for one person it was a moment of feeling a real sense of support:

I think my real informal supports came in once I had reached the shelter and I had found I made friends. I was able to speak with counsellors, but more often it would be my roommates." - Participant

Figure 8: Informal supports accessed.

The following figures depict those services to which participants stated they have received support from in each of these larger categories.

Family Members

Receiving informal support from family members was inconsistent across participants. Many of the participants reported having negative relationships with family members, particularly parents. However, for those who were able to lean on family for support they talked about reaching out to members of their family that may have grown up outside of their religious communities, brothers and sisters and distant family (**see Figure 9**):

" I had a family member who was not a part of the community, the religious community that I grew up in, who recommended that I apply for Ontario Works. And so, I did contact them for help."- Participant

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"While I was here in Canada after the marriage, I found that my aunt was somebody I could speak with. She didn't offer me any support per say but she was definitely someone I could speak with and, bounce my own feelings off of, and she would kind of calm me down." – Participant

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For others, reaching out to family was not an option and participants actively advised against it:

"But um, I think the tricky part about asking your community members, or at least that can be in family circle for help is that they're not going to help you. That's all they know, is how to oppress or weaken the women, to keep her in the marriage or make them not look bad or all that things that are not important.
The biggest advice is don't go do your immediate family, your uncles, moms, dads. Don't! "- Participant

---

Several participants shared the fear that by asking family for help word would get back to the abuser:

"I wasn't able to talk to someone who was a family member from my country, because they could just go and tell. And … if you speak the language, you talk to somebody else who doesn't know you or your abuser, and then you could go get help. And you could be like… you could trust that person that she's not, or he's not gonna tell him." - Participant

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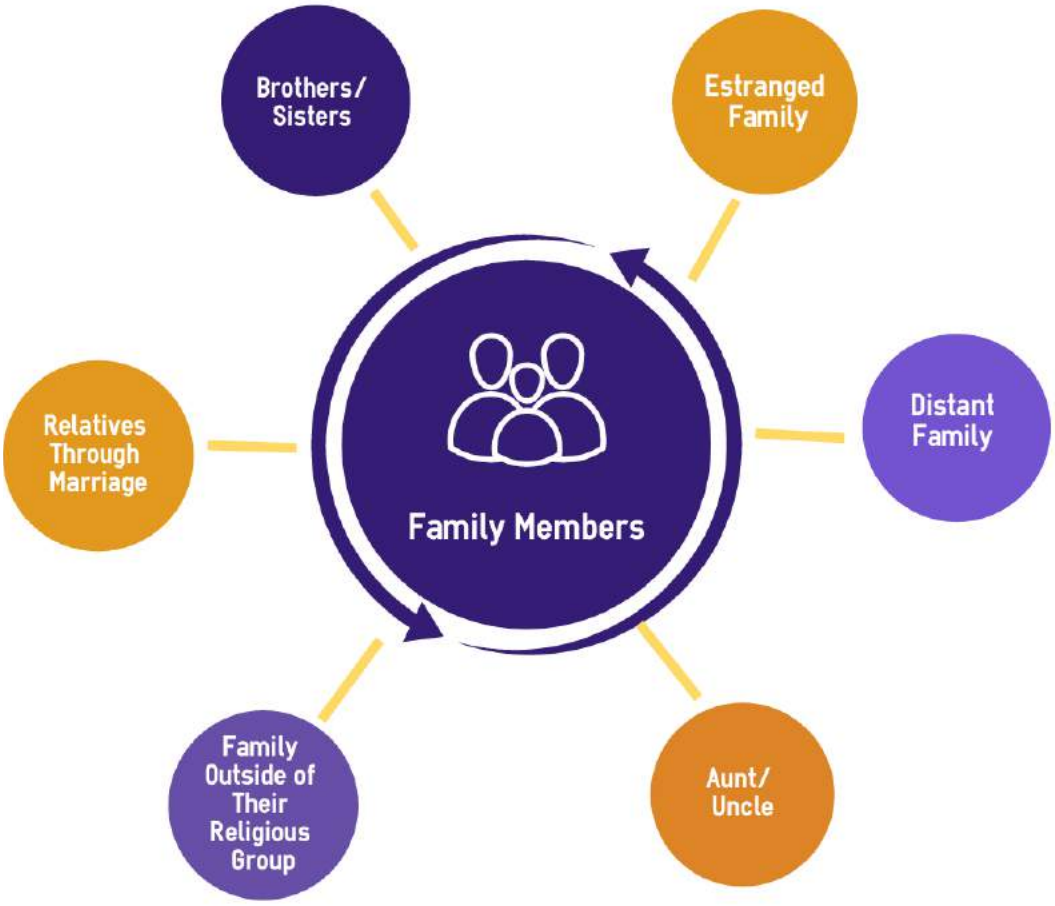

Figure 9: Family members as informal supports.

Faith Leaders

Like most of the informal supports named, participants differed in their desire and ability to approach their religious leaders for support. For others they did not identify as religious (**see Figure 10**):

"... because I kept it so secret, this whole topic, that I didn't think that I could expose this to them and uh... I wasn't that religious so there wasn't any faith leaders I could talk to..."- Participant

Figure 10: Faith leaders as informal supports.

One participant reflected on a positive experience in a mosque helping a forced marriage survivor explain to their family what they were doing was wrong:

"Basically like what she did, she went to like her mosque and she told, like the person there, that she was having a very bad situation and being abused. And, basically like, the mosque people, like the people there, they all went to her family and they basically told her family that what you're doing is wrong."- Participant

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Friends

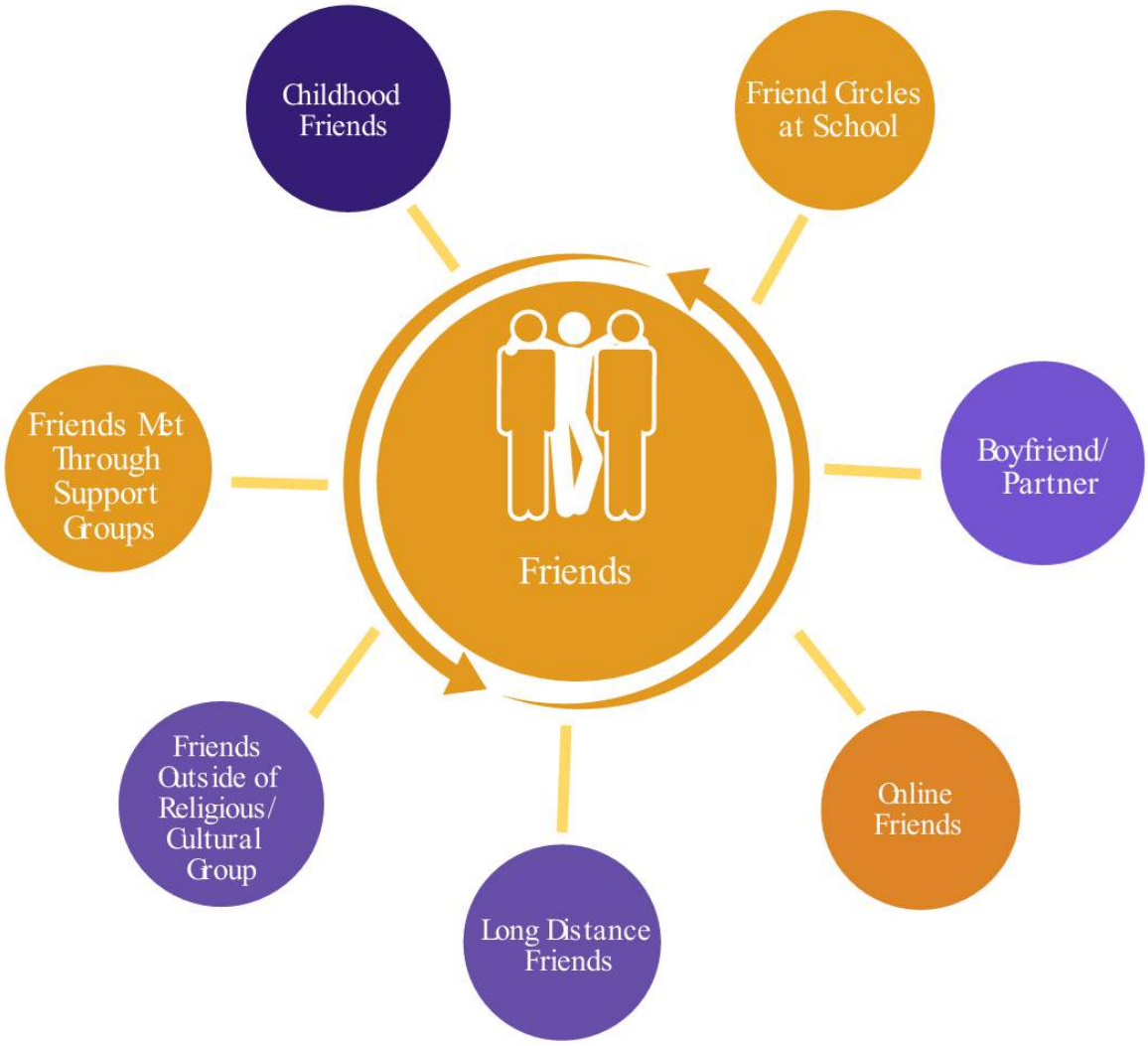

Figure 11: Friends as informal supports.

Again divided, some participants were able to access friends for support (**see Figure 11**), while others did not feel like accessing friend support was safe to do. For those accessing friends as informal

supports the key commonality was that the friend needed to be removed from the survivors family /situation or be outside of their cultural/religious group. This rooted back to the fear of their families and/or abuser(s) finding out their location or other information. Although conflicted, one participant talked about friends being easier to go to than family:

"The reason I'd go to my friends instead of my parents is because my parents seem to, as they are immigrants, they have different thoughts and opinions. So if I'm with people that I've known, like I've known them for ten years, like I've known them for a long time and they have the same opinions as me, they'll know what I'm going through"- Participants

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Sometimes the insight and recommendations from informal supports were participants first step in accessing services or challenging injustice. One participant talked about their friend's role in returning to Canada:

"Yeah, friends. My friends helped me. They actually told me that I could, you know, apply to go back, because I am citizen. So, I could legally ask for help."- Participant

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A couple participants talked about feeling scared or ashamed to tell their friends. One participant shared:

"I won't tell my friends, just my close friends then later on I told them that yeah, I just got engaged, but don't tell this, don't expose my secret to anybody. "- Participant

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Sometimes accessing formal supports lent way to participants' being able to share with their friends what was happening to them:

"Once I made my phone call to South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario, once I started to research and learn a little bit more on my own through the internet of what forced marriage was, once I was connected with that symposium people like yourself [I Do! Project] and other people that gave me that confidence to be able to share with my inner circle, my close friends who I worked with, who were my family of choice."- Participant

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Broken relationships were another reality for participants, that many of the friendships they had prior to their experience of forced marriage were severed due to friends supporting the forced marriage or the controlling nature of their partners. One participant wrote:

"I wasn't communicating with any family or friends because of the relationship I was in. It was more like a very hostile area that I lived in. "- Participant

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Personal Advocates

Personal advocates as informal supports included both those whose were intentional advocates and those who found themselves in a situation where they needed to advocate and become involved for the wellbeing of the participant (**see Figure 12**). Personal advocates were brought up a number of times as an emergency and ongoing support for participants. One participant stated:

"My personal individuals that helped me. I said earlier, a lot of people don't know a lot of advocates. I mean, with, with the kind of also help that they got from a lot of people that I don't know but personally I know these two have had a great big hand in getting me."- Participant

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Figure 12: Peers as personal supports.

Concerning personal advocates and informal supports, the research found that often participants who referenced staff members at agencies specifically, typically did so because staff went above and beyond the participants expectations. These people took on a separate identity from the agency they are employed by, leading them to be a sort of informal support within the context for a formal agency and were often referred to by first name in the interviews and considered informal supports versus staff members of an agency.

Peers

Peers were defined as those with shared experience and were perhaps the most fondly talked about among the informal supports (see **Figure 13**). Participants almost unanimously discussed the importance of connecting with someone who had experienced and understands what they were going through. Peers challenged participants feelings of isolation, helped participants to feel grounded and to better understand their situation and helped to provide practical solutions and tips based on their own experience. A number of participants reflected on this with their experience participating in the Survivor's Group facilitated by the I Do! Project:

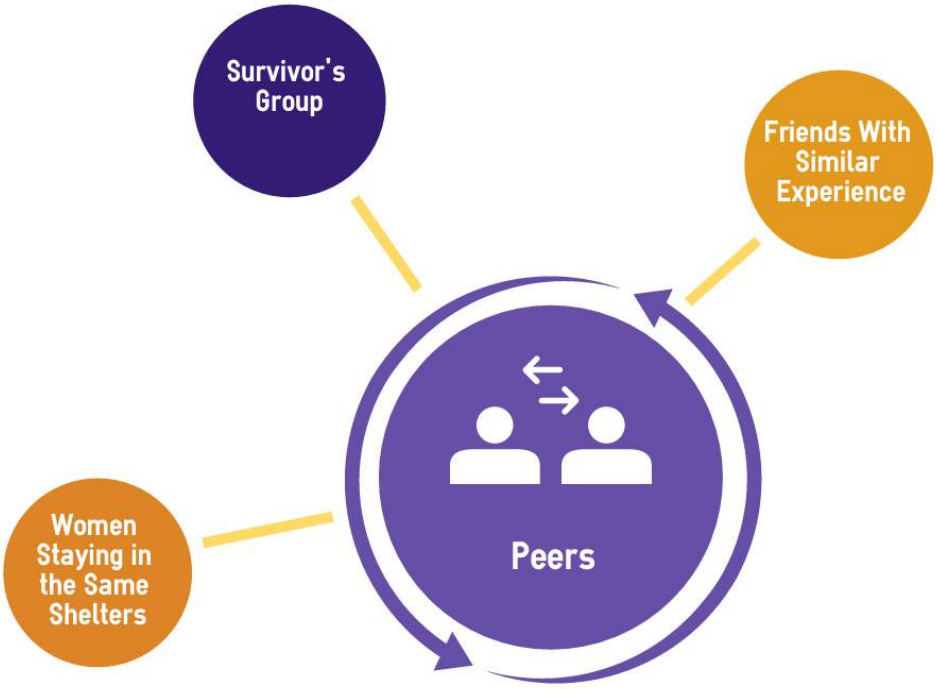

Figure 13: Personal advocates as informal supports.

"I would rely on my friends at survivor's group? Because I feel like they understand me in that sense. I feel like I didn't really open much up to them but I feel like they understand either way"- Participant

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"… I have met a few friends from there [survivor's group] that I still consider like close friends of mine that have been through the same thing and that are helping me through the problems … so it's kind of like a whole little community of people that are helping people and I feel like that helps a lot."- Participant

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"Yeah, that's why it felt more accomplishable talking to the people from the survivors group and the I Do! Project, because they went through the same thing and were also told the same thing, so I was like, okay I can tell them because they'll understand."- Participant

Sometimes the survivor's group was the source of support participants felt the most comfortable accessing:

" Did I receive support from any formal agencies? Um, no… Because I wasn't really I guess you can say comfortable like speaking about my situation. I was more comfortable with the survivors group and the I Do! Project more so then… like I didn't really speak out to anybody else no."- Participant

"Yeah people that have experienced what I have experienced are in the group so I just felt more comfortable because they're going through the same thing."- Participant

One participant reflected on talking about forced marriage among a group of women (the Survivor's Group) as a very new and positive experience:

" The women in my community don't generally say very much. You might be a very profound intellectual, but not having a voice really curbs that dramatically, so… and not having other people listen to your point of view either. Only men are really listened to, so, um, that was a totally new experience for me, to have, a group of females who I was communicating with on a social topic, that would never be discussed in my community, even among the women. Because I think that anyone who did know anything about this subject was too scared to break any social code or way of life."- Participant

In the end, shared experiences (whether discovered through the survivor's group, shelters or informally) were important to many of the participants and their shared experience made an authentic connection and that was felt to be very important to their wellbeing:

"There was another girl at the shelter who was going through the same thing as I was and she was also helpful… Getting to know the same people that went through the same thing helps a lot."- Participant

Experience of Current System of Support

Navigating the System

Participants talked about the lack of specific services for survivors of forced marriage in the GTA. As such, they found themselves, more often than not, struggling to navigate the social services system to find the appropriate supports for their needs. One participant shared:

"It's very difficult to navigate, especially when you start like… 'cause most people will start with the police or CAS and it's so difficult to navigate from there. So I was very lucky to get in touch with the I Do! Project, because I felt like if I wasn't able to um… access anyone who was knowledge about forced marriages, I think that I would struggle a lot on the future."- Participant

Another participant talked about the accessibility and visibility of supports. This linked back to many services not specifically stating they support survivors of forced marriage:

"There may be supports present but may not be accessible because I don't know that they're there. "
- Participant

Beyond just understanding what supports were meant for them, several participants also reflected on the difficulty they had understanding where services were located. This was particularly so for those who were new to Canada as well as those new to Toronto. Participants talked about using services like 211 or receiving direction from Immigration Officers. They also talked about the strategy of doing self-directed research, which typically meant they searched online. For some this was a preferable way to learn about services:

" I would do more self directed sort of research instead of getting the hospital involved."- Participant

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"There is no place to actually go and walk in and be able to say I need a counselor for this and it's not like a central agency that kind of governs everything you can go to so you would have to do your own research and see what kind of issues counsellors work with, who do you think is a better fit, who is affordable, who is in your area, there is a lot of research that goes into it... "- Participant

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"Really I relied on online sources."- Participant

"Oh! Mostly, like, I would just ask, like, around. Or I would just go on Google and, like, research it."- Participant

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"I found out about it when I was, like, in Somalia. I was, like, in, like, I went to Google, obviously, I used to Google a lot of things."- Participant

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Participants talked about those who first helped them to navigate the system. These supports were sometimes first responders, such as the police:

"I called the police myself because at that time I didn't know what steps to take first or where to go, the whole system, but now I know."- Participant

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Participants talked about international organizations they found online assisting them. In one case, while the participant was living in the GTA, the resource they found online was the Forced Marriage Unit in London, England, who was then able to refer the participant to local supports:

"I had reached out to the forced marriage unit in London, England because they were really the only ones that I, through my research, was able to find, you know, that kind of labeled their agency that, and so in chatting with them, once they identified that I lived in Canada, they then referred me to the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario."- Participant

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COSTI was also identified as a point of access in navigating the system:

"That [COSTI] is the first organization that held me, and that is the first organization that like took me to places, made my bank account, made my health card and what not."- Participant

Out of all of the ways to navigate and access the system two methods were mostly favourably talked about: (1) assistance through shelters and (2) word of mouth. When it came to shelters, participants found that most shelters had built in supports and processes for ensuring they were able to access support to meet their needs. To the participants that talked about their shelter experience in this light, this was considered a turning point in their journey:

"Not only was I able to find a place of safety, which allowed me to kind of gather my thoughts, plan for the future, but I was also able to find resources that I didn't have to go out and hunt. Um, so that, because that hunting, or being able, having to go out is also not always possible. If you're worried for your safety, you're not going to be able to go out all that often."- Participant

"I later was in touch with a woman who worked at the women's shelter in my city. And she kind of explained um… at least the system of the shelters and the resources I can get in terms of housing and safety and such… yeah I think she's the one kind of navigating me afterwards."- Participant

Word of mouth was a popular way for participants to learn about services, particularly when they were connected with other survivors through peer groups. When it came to word of mouth as a way to navigate the system the noted benefit was having direct first hand knowledge of people's experience of the service:

" I would have possible people who went through those specific resources or that process that could tell me how that went and how that helped them. So it would help me feel more comfortable, or it would help me actually decide whether I wanted to go through that path or not, so it's helpful in the sense … I'll also get some feedback on how those resources are."- Participant

Experience of Services

It is important to understand where the strengths and weaknesses are in terms of support, particularly with reflection to the people and policies that animate this system. Participants talked about the current system of support in both a positive and negative lens, often experiencing both along their journey. Among the more notable areas of focus were adapting to a new culture with new ways, shelter and housing, policies and procedures preventing support, racism and discrimination, topic ambiguity and turning point moments.

A New Culture With New Ways

For participants not native to Canada, one of the largest barriers to accessing service was the fact that they were trying to understand and adapt to a whole new society, where they often experienced language barriers, while also attempting to access the support they need. One participant shared:

"Umm, the challenges? (Sigh) Basically, everything, being able to make sense of a totally different society that I was participating in, because, the society that I grew up in has different rules and has different social systems and it doesn't resemble in any way the world that I was cast into."- Participant

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Someone else talked about even learning about how to be safe using traffic lights:

"I was in a position of being really new, of now really knowing what the system was like, I mean I was still trying to figure out how the traffic lights work and what colours means you can cross the street."- Participant

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And for some the institutions in Canada did not have the same meaning or legitimacy as those same institutions elsewhere:

"But my friend comes from a country where like the police system is really bad. Like they don't take it seriously. "- Participant

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However, for one participant, while this complete change in everything familiar made her journey harder, upon reflection was thankful for the diversity she was exposed to:

"... a positive thing that I've learned through leaving my environment is how much knowledge I've gained? I know that I started to be exposed to different people and different cultures and religions and that was not something that I was able to do when I was living with my community, it was very close knit and I never really interacted with Muslims who had different beliefs or non-Muslims or even people of different races."
- Participant

Geographic Barriers

Participants also talked about the role of space and moving to new areas and how that required them to learn about a new geographical setting, where to go and ways to get around:

"I'm not really, you know, familiar with the geographical settings of this area. So it was really difficult finding places for me and then the means of transportation. Actually, the TTC and what not. Back home we don't have that, we have motorcycles that you call and they take you wherever and they take you door to door service."
- Participant

Another geographical issue that several participants struggled with was not being able to access services around the city because their partner or potential partner lived in the same city as them and as such they felt by accessing certain locations that they were putting themselves at risk. One participant shared:

"I think just the fact that knowing that your partner or potential partner is also living in the same city really restricts your opportunities to be able to move around freely, and that kind of narrows your options as to where you can avail services."- Participant

Shelter & Housing

When it came to shelter and housing participants felt that shelters opened up access to supports in an easier and organized way. However, the pressure to move into their own housing was very apparent and stressful for some participants. This pressure often led to further anxiety over employment, co-signers, first and last months rent and furnishing their new space.

Participants felt significant pressure to move from the shelter into more permanent housing. Sometimes this experience manifested in feelings of being blamed or shamed:

"The shelter told me to go get the apartment. They were always pushing me to get out. I was very stressed from the way I was treated. They never contacted me when I left. They didn't call me. I told them the apartment they wouldn't help. Then the shelter worker called me and yelled at me and said, 'Why you tell the apartment I don't help you?' She blamed me for everything."- Participant

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One participant reflected on her short six week shelter stay:

"The length of time that I would like to stay in the shelter. It's very pressuring, it's… oh you have 6 weeks… there's other people that will be coming into the shelter… oh you have to get a place and then they told me I wasn't allowed to be. I don't have priority for housing because there's no proof of my ex-husband lived in Canada. So yeah, I would change that - that was a struggle."- Participant

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Adding to the pressure to find housing one participant talked about the limitations of Ontario Works (OW):

"There isn't enough from OW to support myself and my son. They only give me two-thirds of my rent so I have to pay all my food money for rent. We slept for two weeks on the floor because we didn't have any furniture at all. But still they made me move out when I got an apartment even though I had no furniture."- Participant

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One participant talked about a shelter experience that limited her ability to provide to her children. Which was something of great importance to her:

"The shelter I was, it was a family shelter and I had to wait for the cook to cook dinner or … lunch, breakfast, and the kitchen was locked so I had to wait and whenever my kids asked for an apple I couldn't. I didn't have a

key to open it and give them an apple. They would just cry and I…. I would just say 'Wait, they're gonna open it at lunch time or dinner time'."- Participant

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It is important to note that this participant also talked about a positive experience at another shelter, which was more 'house style' and gave her the autonomy to provide to her children when they needed it. A number of participants recounted positive experiences with using shelters. One of the more mentioned experiences was in cases where participants were allowed to stay longer than typically mandated:

" I think it was like, three or fours months only and they allowed me to stay there longer because I had no means of staying anywhere yet. I didn't have a job. I didn't have any IDs. Just because it was taking a while for all of them to be processed, so they let me stay there at least six or seven months longer than they allowed anyone else to stay."- Participant

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And sometimes not only were participants able to stay longer than typically expected but the staff at the shelter celebrated their family milestones with them:

"People were only allowed to live there for three months and I stayed there for five months, but even then they always treated me specially you know. My son had his very first birthday and we were there and they threw a big party for him. It was so special, they bought so many gifts for him, everybody he was like their favourite, everybody wanted to take pictures. I still have pictures with each and every shelter worker with him."
- Participant

Another participant talked about the value of the built in support they found in the shelter:

" I think my experience has been positive in terms of the route that I was able to take. Shelters have, most shelters, have inbuilt support for women who do come in, even if it was short term. There would be counselling, they would be able to fast track your legal aid certificate, they already have lawyers on hand, so those kind of things happen quickly. For me it was a faster process and I was able to access services."
- Participant

One last area of concern was brought up by participants was their post shelter experience and how the lack of temporary housing and post-shelter support impacted their lives negatively:

"So in terms of formal support I do feel like I was supported to the maximum extent possible at the shelter. After leaving the shelter, it was harder to access support like counselling and therapy services. It is extremely expensive in the city and they have wait times… I, my personal choice was feminist counselling was not available like very easily, so those were some of the barriers I experienced in accessing support services after I left the shelter and that is something that is very ongoing."- Participant

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Service Misses

Service misses refers to opportunities, policies and procedures that worked against participants while they searched for or accessed supports. Among those misses talked about by participants were barriers because their abuse occurred outside Canada, limited opportunities for single applicants, criminalization of forced marriage, sponsorship and the immediacy of support. Several participants talked about barriers to service that they encountered because the were deemed ineligible or 'less priority' because their experience of abuse/forced marriage happened outside of Canada:

"The supports that I found were like for women, feeling like abuse, even though a lot of them weren't particularly for like forced marriage women, it was, like, mostly for like abused women and women that are abused in Canada. So, yeah, it was kind of, like, hard getting housing 'cause it was mostly for people who had problems in Canada. They don't really consider abuse, if you're outside of Canada, so yeah."- Participant

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"When I talked to people at the shelter, I would tell them can I, like, get housing? They're, like, most of the time if the abuse took place outside of Canada it would kind of be hard for you so."- Participant

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Another participant talked about the lack of priority for single applicants (as they defined themselves) when it came to housing:

"The resources are greater for individuals with dependents than it is for single applicants. It's very challenging for a single applicant to try and secure safe housing, to um, the system itself. It's just… you know, it's very very challenging I would say."- Participant

Participants also talked about the struggle to obtain their documents, such as IDs. One participant talked about the struggle to change her address, because when she applied for IDs they went to her husbands (whom she was trying to flee) address:

"I left before I had any of my documents, any of my IDs, and I left my husband. I think the biggest challenge I faced was to get those IDs. All of those IDs came to his address. It's hard because nobody is going to allow you to change your address unless you can show them a Canadian ID. I had my passport, but they wouldn't take that. This happens to a lot of women even if they have been in Canada for a while or they may have grown up here, they often might not have IDs. So not having IDs is a common barrier that I've kind of faced in accessing services and that can be very challenging."- Participant

The amount of time it took to get IDs was an area of concern, as it was taking much longer than they would have liked and how it made getting support and moving into housing nearly impossible.

Related to the address barrier, one participant talked about being sponsored by her husband and how fleeing her husband meant violating immigration rules:

"So my husband had sponsored me and as part of the immigration rules, which I believe came into effect in 2012. A person who is sponsoring their spouse, the person who gets sponsored is under condition to live for two years with the person, with their sponsor. And often that is pretty much like a sword hanging over their head. The condition includes that there may be visits from the immigration authorities, like unannounced visits or they need to actually cohabitate together and that was something that was scary because I had only been in Canada living with him for one month before I decided that I just couldn't take it anymore. So, I hadn't fulfilled the conditions and then that's when I would have to inform immigration that I know I came under this condition but I cannot live anymore with this person and I cannot fulfill this condition."- Participant

Several other participants talked about the importance of forced marriage being criminalized in Canada and how that played into moving forward in their journey:

"Well because it's been criminalized, I mean I would talk to the police about it. I have wanted to do that for a very long time actually, ever since the social worker came and visited me when I was a child and I started to have some awareness that there was some other narrative that was going on here… Like I've wanted to do something about it. So, I would say, probably at this stage going to the police and the legal authorities to try to protect myself and make some changes is what I should do."- Participant

"…, but I still need to talk to the police here in Canada. And, I mean, the timing of this also has become a bit sensitive because of the criminalization in Canada. I couldn't do anything about this 'til the laws had been passed. It's very frustrating because I've kind of waited for years for something like this to happen, for the law to be passed."- Participant

The Understanding Of and Attitude Towards Forced Marriage

Participants talked in length about the abundance of work to be done in terms of raising awareness among service providers about forced marriage as well as addressing acts of discrimination. One participant talked about a negative experience she had with a staff member at a shelter:

"When I asked where the bus stop was, the shelter worker said, 'If you don't know about the bus stop, what are you fucking doing here? You should go back to your country.' She used that word to me."- Participant

Another talked about being denied a present for her son at a community hand out:

"We went to the Hub at Ellesmere and Kennedy. They were giving gifts for Christmas. I went with my son and my friend went with her son. She is a Canadian citizen and has lived here 15 years. They gave her toys for her son. When I showed her my refugee card, they said 'You are not eligible for these gifts.' She has more money but she gets gifts for her son. I have nothing but my son could not get a gift. He stood there watching the other child play with his toys and looking hurt."- Participant

Another participant reflected on an unnamed agency compromising service to avoid the community out lash:

"I think that was their main issue because they assumed that um, let's say if they started to put me into care or they started to listen to my concerns it would definitely uh, create like a.... out lash within the community and racism would be like a main topic."- Participant

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Even more, in one situation a participants' case was transferred to another staff member because of a lack of understanding of forced marriage and perceptions of race:

"She didn't really have much experience when it comes to honoured violence. I don't think she knew how to handle it. So I think that's the reason why my case was transferred to another person, who is actually from my community, who is actually my father's friend, and they said that the reason why they had to move my case is because they felt that because she's a white woman it wouldn't work well with the community, and also she might not understand..."- Participant

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A large number of participants talked about being dismissed or feeling dismissed by services in the community. This was in part contributed to a lack of understanding of and knowledge about forced marriage as well as disbelief that it is an issue happening in Canada. One participant talked about her experience with the police:

"The police shouldn't dismiss you. They do that with women who are raped or with domestic violence. That's wrong. They should accept even the weirdest thing a person is saying and investigate and help them. They shouldn't just dismiss something because it's weird to them and they don't believe it. I actually put myself in a lot of danger when I went to the police. "- Participant

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Others talked more generally about being dismissed or asked to provide proof of their experience:

"They were dismissive. They didn't think this sort of thing happens today. They think I'm making it up. They wouldn't do anything. They said I have to provide proof or they are not going to do anything."- Participant

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"Same, all the same. They were dismissive. Not really believing me. If I didn't have the recording I wouldn't get any help. No one believes me when I say what happened to me."- Participant

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Overall, it was clear that almost every participant had experienced a situation where the lack of understanding and knowledge about the issue of forced marriage among service professionals resulted in a negative experience. One participant painfully talked about her experience with the disbelief and misunderstanding of her situation:

"They don't think this can happen in Canada. It upsets their view of things. They think it's so easy to get out of these things in Canada. They just don't know. They didn't know how to help and they didn't try to get anyone who could help. Maybe there was no one. I don't know. But there should be someone. I'm not the only person this happens to."- Participant

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And sometimes participants just felt like the intentions of service providers was good but they just needed more training and understanding:

"Uh, you know, they're pretty good but sometimes they just need a little bit more training."- Participant

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"I felt like the counsellor heard what I said but didn't sympathize, or empathize, whatever the right word is. She heard but she couldn't relate. It was something she had no understanding about. She didn't understand that this is something that happens and it's my life."- Participant

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"I think I went through about three different counsellors before I found the right one… she actually went out and did her own research, and she read about it online to understand and how to provide me the counsel that would help me through my journey. But it took three counsellors. It was the third one, you know what I mean, so we're still kind of behind the times still. We've come a long way but we still have a ways to go."- Participant

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However, when a service provider was knowledgeable on the topic of forced marriage, the results were life changing:

"I had a bit of an emotional release once I realized that the person at the other end of the line actually did have a very good grasp of the social issue that I was encountering of forced marriage."- Participant

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Turning Points

Participants had much to share about positive experiences they had in accessing support. These often included moments of compassion, people going the extra mile, feeling less alone and getting guidance and support. We called these 'turning points'. One participant talked about the moment where she saw an advertisement (developed by The I Do! Project) that perfectly described what she was experiencing:

"Actually, one day I was riding on the bus, and I saw the ad for the I Do! Project.. And uh, I was really, you know, having a terrible day – I was crying in public, on the bus, when I saw this. And I looked up at the advertisement and thought 'wow, that was me. This is my problem'. I didn't even have the words to articulate what circumstance I was in and I reached out and I phoned the number that I saw on the bus and I got in contact with the I Do! Project."- Participant

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Participants also talked about positive experiences with the police*:*

"They were good - they help me. They talk to me, they didn't arrest me, and they knew where to take me - they didn't treat me like a criminal."- Participant

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As well as other organizations such as FCJ, Sandgate, and Ontario Works:

"But when I went to FCJ they helped me a lot. And they gave me a healthy life so there are so many positive things about them."- Participant

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"Positive shelter experience with Sandgate, they knew about forced marriage and helped my case. Getting work and returning to school."- Participant

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"It is, there is Ontario works, they were helpful too, like, they guide me as much as they can and they help me out as much as they can. As much as it's in their policy to."- Participant

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Some participants attributed the help they got to their survival:

"Just really helpful. And that I know I wouldn't be able to survive if they, if I didn't have the backup that you guys all gave me."- Participant

And even more, for one participant this support was unconditional:

"No matter where I was or how much help I needed, I always got it. There were people who were positive in their attitude towards me. They, you know, they gave me the confidence."- Participant

Research Results: Service Providers

When talking to service providers and advocates about their experience working within the realm of forced marriage in the GTA some key themes emerged such as, the narrative around forced marriage, the capacity of our current system of support, ways to build capacity and specific suggestions.

Narrative

Participants talked about the narrative of forced marriage and how the issue was understood and talked about in the community. Participants talked about how forced marriage should be part of the conversation when people talk about domestic violence and intimate partner violence but often it is not. One participant felt this was particularly the case because in almost every forced marriage they had encountered there were most definitely issues of domestic violence:

"And I would say every case that I have heard of where it was only the woman who was forced to be married, they have all had domestic violence. The only couple of cases I've come across that didn't, they were both being forced. So I think the importance of the connection with this, with all the other forms of violence has to be made, you can't just sell it as one subject."- Participant

However, much of the narrative or dichotomy experienced in the community was of an 'othering' nature, with people not connecting the dots that all of these forms of violence exist together and not

apart. One participant talked about how forced marriage is still sometimes understood as an aside of the larger violence conversation:

"When we talk about sexual assault, when we talk about sexual violence, when we talk about rape, when we talk about intimate partner violence, is that these are things that happen in forced marriages and people don't connect those dots. Right, we're very comfortable I would say as a system to talk about things in very specific ways and see them in very specific ways. We still have this impression that it doesn't happen to us, but it happens to other people and it happens to other people in different ways. Forced marriage doesn't happen to us, it happens to others and it's their type of domestic violence or intimate partner violence, it's not ours." - Participant

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Participants drew similarities between intimate partner violence, domestic violence and forced marriage but one participant encouraged service providers not to pathologize and to see both the similarities in cases and needs and differences:

"Their core experiences are very similar. So it's making the connections to the similarities and also talking about the way it manifests itself a little differently in each case. They're both important."- Participant

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Forced marriage was often thought in the community as happening to only specific subsets of women. This ideology is something participants struggled with as they felt there is no one experience of forced marriage that is the same as the other. This ideology neglected to encompass the diversity of experiences and the role of intersectionality and gender-based violence and their relationship to one another. One participant shared:

'I think the other piece is around understanding gender-based violence and intersectionality and their relationship to one another. I don't think we talk about that enough, there isn't space to talk about these issues and their relationship.' -Participant

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Another issue brought forward by participants was the idea that the issue of forced marriage only affected certain subsets of people. One participant shared examples of supporting women in middle-class lifestyles escape forced marriage but yet still being faced with the assumptions from others that all forced

marriages are girls in poverty and them needing this person (their future husband) to save them. Another participant went on to talk about how forced marriage is often thought to be segregated to particular communities but by emphasizing only those communities the greater picture of the diversity of people forced marriage affects becomes lost:

" I still think it's a topic that seems to be segregated to particular communities. It's kind of placed over there. Like I understand sometime, it is within an organization because you want to create a safe space for that group, for that cultural, linguistic specific group. I think that's important but I also think it takes away from the understanding of this issue as it may pertain to any number of relationships and families. I think even taking it out of the IPV, personal relationship thing, I think forced marriage occurs within a family context, a community context. I think that if we start to think about it in that way, and align it with the issues of violence, and see it as a form of sexual violence, a form of domestic violence, gender-based violence, like all of those pieces. It has more legs, right, like I think it can move much further."- Participant

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And in the end participants agreed that the understanding and language around forced marriage is still largely absent in the greater support community but that more conversations are starting to happen and more people were starting to recognize and see how forced marriage is limiting peoples access and something needs to be done about it.

Current System Capacity

The System

Participants talked about their perceptions of how the current system of support works. They emphasized barriers to good service, which was rooted in both practices that fell short of supporting survivors, bureaucratic processes, and the struggle around whose issue forced marriage is to respond to. Participants also talked about the informal work being done by champions and agency champions in the community and how that helped fill some of the glaring gaps in services for survivors.

When it came to looking at the system to which forced marriage works under, particularly gender-based violence, participants were critical of the systems ability to support good work for survivors because of it's roots in patriarchal ideology and it's often lack of ability to address intersectionality:

"There's a particular narrative in that approach itself, right, so we didn't have diverse people building our domestic violence or gender-based violence system, we had a white patriarchal society build those things. So in unpacking that we understand how the idea of intersectionality is completely missed within the system. So now we're trying to push this new topic of forced marriage in a system that could readily respond to it if it was more understanding in its approach in how to address the issue in the first place."

- Participant

Participants felt that forced marriage often got lost in the conversation of gender-based violence or intimate partner violence. One participant flipped the ideology that forced marriage is an outcome of these two overarching focus areas and instead was a potential way to identify gender-based violence or intimate partner violence:

"We could have the systems and structures in place, however, because we narrate it by using and saying woman abuse or intimate partner violence we may not see the relationship or understand that intimate partner violence is often a product of a forced marriage so then how do we then connect the dots?"

- Participant

Another critique of the system is that it there is little room for conversations about different forms of gendered violence and the ideology that some areas of gendered violence need to be a priority of others, thus negating the individual who should be the priority. One participant shared:

"So we strongly believe that we should be intervening and preventing intimate partner violence but what does that mean for all of the other forms of gender-based violence? How do we then bring in those other forms, into our context, recognizing that one is not more of a priority than the other? It's the individual that's the priority and regardless of whether they're being trafficked or being forced to marry or in a domestic violence situation it's our job to be able to identify, intervene and respond in an equitable way. And I think that's the part that becomes a challenge because then you have to try to have this conversation in a system that doesn't acknowledge that these things exist within its practice."- Participant

Another debate among participants was if forced marriage was a social or health issue. Some participants saw this as something that should have a place in the health realm- under the umbrella of gendered-

violence, whereas others saw this as a social issue and that the social sector should be primarily responsible for responding to the needs of survivors:

" I think that needs to be explored where it best fits because it doesn't fit, it won't fit, as a health issue. It's a social issue."- Participant

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Often participants felt that leadership and funding for forced marriage should come from the provincial government. But regardless of who should be taking leadership, presently the community sector appears to be the most involved in addressing forced marriage, supporting survivors and attempting to fill in gaps in services as much as possible. But as long as this is so, there will be only a small number of organizations that articulate their experience in this area, their processes will largely be informal and there will be a continued need for change at a policy level:

"And it's still living in the spaces that are largely controlled by the community sector, the non-profit sector, versus decisions, like policy makers seeing it as something they need to incorporate in how they do the work." - Participant

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"The risk that policy makers won't create structural and systemic changes to support is very real." - Participant

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The lack of structural or systemic changes combined with no clear stream of funding coming into the GTA specifically for forced marriage has resulted in service providers experiencing the same barriers to support as outlined by many of the survivors participating in this research. They talked about barriers to receiving the financial support needed to truly cover all of the needs of survivors, provided many survivors were starting their lives over from scratch. There are increased needs for long-term counselling and shelter/housing that often weren't met. One participant shared that often survivors end up staying at shelters longer than others, which was also mentioned by survivors participating in this research. This was often attributed to the high demand for affordable housing or the length of time for processes to be executed, such as name changes and IDs:

"There's a huge line up for all of these processes and a lot of times it's slow. So I have a case that we had, I believe we waited for four months for a name change. So it's a very long process and our shelters are short-term stay. Because of the long processes to access all of these services and the long wait-list we have I don't think we have served a woman who has experienced a forced marriage for anything less than five months. Our stays are usually 6-8 weeks."- Participant

Identifying Forced Marriage

One of the clear areas of struggle was in identifying if a forced marriage had occurred. This issue was two fold: (1) For some it was a reflection of their (and their colleagues) confidence level in identifying when an issue might be forced marriage, and (2) Current intake procedures not reflecting the diverse experience of forced marriage. In terms of confidence levels, this could be due to missing indicators, not being as frequently exposed to the issue (or at least aware that they are being exposed to the issue) or a sense of uneasiness asking if what the person is experiencing is a forced marriage in fear that the person may be upset by the question. Several participants admitted to situations where they did not realize until a later point in time that what someone was describing was an experience of forced marriage:

"I wasn't proficient enough in it [forced marriage] so we just figured, 'hey, maybe that's how they live their cultural portions of their lives', but later on as I got more involved and heard other people talk I realized." - Participant

Most participants talked about finding 'experts' (in the area of forced marriage) to assist them, versus addressing the situation by themselves. Being able to receive support from an 'expert' helped make them more confident around identifying forced marriage and supporting survivors. Unfortunately, sometimes this was actually more of a referral than just learning how to properly support a survivor themselves:

"I mean, for me, thank god I work with service providers who are in the field. So, I would most likely talk in confidence and say 'here's some signs that I'm seeing. You being the expert, have an opportunity now to engage and follow up a bit more.' That's how it works from my perspective because I still might not know more, or feel secure enough to establish that's happening. But definitely I'll refer it to someone that has some expertise in the field."- Participant

Part of being able to recognize forced marriages led the conversation to agencies intake procedures and the opportunity to strengthen this process. Participants talked about the need for better processes and procedures to identify forced marriage during intakes. Particularly there is a need to ensure that the 'check boxes' on intake forms are not just reflecting particular scenarios but encompassing of all the unique experiences of forced marriage. One participant shared:

"Which is why being able to say you fit into this box is so hard because we know that the box is treating a particular scenario that many people fall in, but not this group of people."- Participant

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Champions

Throughout the focus groups with service providers it became apparent that much of the work being done around forced marriage specifically is being done by champions and champion agencies. Many of the champions and champion agencies working to support women experiencing forced marriage are doing so to fill a gap and a need, not because they are funded to do so or in some cases mandated to. For those organizations whose mandate does include forced marriage they are often finding themselves working outside the regular parameters and service provision of their organizations and trying to bring in other supports in an organized way to support a survivor.

Because of these champions, some of the glaring issues around supporting survivors of forced marriage become more hidden in the GTA. This is because these champions and champion organizations work to ensure that people do not fall victim to the system. Some of the roles these champions and champion organizations play include: being an 'expert' to help support anyone who contacts them with questions around forced marriage (whether it fits their job role or not), consistently bringing up forced marriage around planning tables related to trafficking and violence or specifically volunteering their time to advocate and support survivors.

One common theme was that champions spent much time intentionally creating dialogue around forced marriage in hopes of making it more commonly understood. One participant felt they were having success with this approach but that there is a constant need to keep the message going:

"From my perspective, one of the things that I've seen, especially over the past two years as I've been bringing up the conversation more intentionally and the I Do! Project did workshops and stuff like that, or even just sending out in our weekly newsletter the words forced marriage, people are seeing the language and whether they're participating or engaging or not it's sitting with them and I'm being contacted for conversations more frequently. But as soon as I know that drops down, I see that drop down as well. Which means it's not sticking, it's not put in a place that has enough power for it to have a longer term impact or is not residing with people in any deeply meaningful way."- Participant

Another role champions played was in bringing the issue into different spaces in the city. While this was felt to be a positive thing there was the reality that these spaces were connected to, or occupied by, champions and there is a barrier to how far that approach can take a cause:

"I would also say that there are spaces, at least within the city, that are being challenged but are also taking on that challenge, which I think is great. But I think that there could be many more of those and they're connected to champions."- Participant

Whether it was within their job role or not, often champions found themselves in a connector role, as the point of contact on issues around forced marriage and it became up to them to leverage relationships with whatever resources necessary to connect organizations and individuals with the needed supports:

"So if - it's more of an organization or individual within an organization that would come to me and say 'okay how do I deal with this', and I would be able to leverage my knowledge and relationship with whatever resources necessary to follow through."- Participant

Those organizations doing work around forced marriage in a more concentrated way were felt to be smaller and fewer between:

"I think that we have a very small circle of support. "- Participant

That is not to say that other organizations are not involved and providing support but they are doing so in secondary roles with the lead organizations often being the ones who are dedicated to supporting survivors regardless of whether they have the funding to do so or not:

"I think that we're willing to work with what we have to support women. We don't necessarily get funded for forced marriage, we don't usually have anything extra put aside to be able to support these young women, but I think that we work very hard to work with what we have to support her in the best way possible depending on her needs. Those are some of the strengths. And we have a lot of community partners who collaborate with us and support us as well when we have such cases."- Participants

Often these organizations relied on creative solutions to filling gaps in services or policy/procedural barriers. One participant talked about the fact that the needs of survivors are not met structurally and so a lot of informal practices are done to work around issues:

"It needs to be structural, it needs to be in there not so we have to find somebody to work around it." - Participant

One participant talked about the need to document and better understand the informal fixes to structural barriers and gaps in services in order to create systemic change:

"South Asian Women's Center is probably another place where I know their workers have done some creative things. But again a lot of people know how to work within the system and figure out ways around it. What we need to do is formalize those pieces because in order to adequately deal with this particular issue and other issues like this- as long as we keep manipulating the system under the radar, it never systemically changes. " - Participant

Building Capacity

Among service providers there was a definite commitment to enhancing the capacity of themselves individually, their agencies, the general public, and the overall system of support for survivors of forced marriage. Participants shared a desire to work on enhancing policies to open up a greater capacity for support:

"Like when I hear that it could be a simple sentence in a policy for some frontline worker to be able to see and how open that will make the process…"- Participant

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There was also talk about addressing the unknown in terms of survivors that were turned away from service or did not have their needs met and finding a way of following up with these individuals in hopes of better understanding both why it happened and how current policies and practices need to change:

"There's no avenue to say 'I didn't use the service but this is how it should be changed so I can use this service'. So if you're the person with the forced marriage and are turned away, you keep looking at what is next. You're never brought back into the conversation of why didn't this work for you."- Participant

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This was also shared in the context of needing to improve the responsiveness of intake procedures in identifying forced marriage:

"So I think in my case it's about the intake procedures, or the questions we're asking or not asking, but those questions need to be changed, um… and when someone is turned away, how do we capture the reason why they're turned away and how is that ever reported on."- Participant

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Several participants talked about trying to enhance their organizations capacity to respond to forced marriage. For one participant this was met with great success:

"While it wasn't in my role or our mandate to directly engage in work or address forced marriage, it was addressed through programming that was brought into the organization, largely to better understand the issue. So to do some more education and awareness and to build competency around addressing the issue.

Then it became something that we felt was necessary for staff, especially front-line settlement workers, to be able to identify and respond to through the work that they were doing with the newcomer community."
- Participant

Planned and Organized Responses

The need to move forward in a planned and thoughtful way was important to participants because they felt that with more funding being allocated to topics like trafficking and forced marriage that there would be the risk of an unorganized approach leading to further small pockets of support versus a coordinated effort. With this, they felt the need to understand and document collaboration that already exists and to build from it. One participant felt that the level of collaboration and exposure that exists has lead to an increased capacity among service providers. They used the police as an example of this:

"What I have noticed is that over the last few years the police have become much more understanding and knowledgeable about the issues of forced marriage and the urgency of these cases. We ask the others to act very quickly when things come up, and those words 'forced marriage' and 'honour-based violence', they respond right away, so here I've noticed that change."- Participant

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The ability for this community to collaborate was considered one of its strengths. One participant talked about the difference in the level of collaboration and responsiveness they experienced when working within Ontario to that in other provinces:

"I've noticed that growth and understanding and being informed but we worked with cases where the women have gone to another province and we've tried to collaborate and we noticed that the police there and even CAS there are not as responsive, not as educated about these issues and do not take anything very seriously in terms of trying to prevent anything further from happening to these young women … I think it differs a lot depending on where you are, what region you're in."- Participant

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In short, most of the service providers acknowledged that there were organized responses that existed and were supporting survivors but that there was much room to grow and formalize these collaborations and to better fund them, particularly as forced marriage becomes a greater focus for funding dollars.

Awareness/Education and Training

Survivors and service providers both shared that there was an increased need for awareness building/ education and training. When it came to raising awareness there was a focus on prevention, in terms of providing presentations to educate the general public and those at-risk, as well as educating service providers. Service providers, participating in the research, who had previously received training around forced marriage talked with more confidence on the issue of and often felt more equipped to respond:

"I think training enhanced some of my sensitivity and awareness to tackle any preconceived notions or maybe limitations I might have had to the scope of this issue and to whom it affects. It can affect anybody of any background, ethno-cultural backgrounds and especially religious background. Some of the peers who came to speak at the training raised significant awareness about that. And, yeah, there's more I could go onto but I think it helped enhance my sensitivities"- Participant

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Another participant mentioned the workshops facilitated by the I Do! Project and shared how it encouraged a staff member to build capacity for helping survivors through her role:

"And I do think some of that, or at least one of the women who participated, or came to me, also participated in the workshops that the I Do! Project held, earlier this year. So she did attend the service provider training to get a better sense of how her role could support, or better facilitate issues as they arise and as they relate to forced marriage."- Participant

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Some noted areas of continued investment in training were with front-line staff, or points of contact and providing opportunities for refreshers for service providers who may not come into as frequent contact with forced marriage:

"I think that the capacity and the understanding and the insight is there and I think continual updating of resources to remind people so that, you know, getting trained once might not be enough if you don't deal with it a lot. It might be an issue that you might want to consider."- Participant

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One participant talked about the need for training to be trauma-informed:

"I think a lot of trauma-informed training is required to work effectively with these women who have experienced forced marriage. I think just training on forced marriage, honour-based violence, to educate on those specific types of violence is very important."- Participant

Service providers also talked about the importance of educating and raising awareness amongst teenagers and even middle school students as a top priority. There was some of this work happening in the community but not in the concentrated or mandated way participants felt was needed. Overall, service providers were encouraged that more conversations were happening around forced marriage in the community but felt that the conversation needed to shift from 'what it is' to 'how to do better':

"I think that I'm exposed to more opportunities to where this is a conversation that's happening. I think that we're still unfortunately largely in the infancy piece around the conversation, more around 'let's talk about what it is' versus 'these are the things that we should be doing to make the system better' and 'oh these are the changes I've made to make this be not an issue anymore'."- Participant

Suggestions

Service providers participating in this research shared a number of suggestions around making the system stronger and better, such as education and training around effectively supporting survivors and around the uniqueness of forced marriage amongst other forms of gender-based violence. They felt there were ways to remove barriers, such as working with OW/ODSP around financial support needs given the complexities of forced marriage situations, ensuring language services are always available- particularly because survivors often had a strained relationship with family members and family members were being relied on to translate in some situations while accessing services. Service providers talked about strengthening intake processes in order to better screen for forced marriage and working with survivors to audit agency policies with the hopes to be able to make recommendations on non-invasive policy changes:

"I forgot to mention is so much of what could happen is already happening, it just needs to be re-tooled and there's so much opportunity in being able to consult or engage with survivors to understand how small changes that may mean nothing to the organization or to the system could do for this group."- Participant

Also working with survivors to better understand why they were turned away or ineligible for a service, again in hopes of creating positive change to policies and procedures. And lastly, one participant emphasized the power of peer groups and wished for more peer groups, specifically survivor's groups, to be made available to women across the county, as well as a general toll free number where you could call to receive information and support at all times.

Recommendations

Support for forced marriage is still a relatively 'new' concept amongst service providers in the GTA and as such there are many opportunities to continue to work towards a stronger and more responsive community. With this is the reality that there are a large number of recommendations that have come out of this research, some of which are focused on providing services, whereas others look at how to create capacity and influence change. There is no definite priority of one over the other and likely this work will rest on the shoulders of survivors, champions and champion agencies. As such, instead of looking at this list of recommendations as a checklist it should be approach it from the perspective of where the most impact can be made based on the expertise and energy available. The following are key recommendation areas followed by potential activities within those areas:

- **Develop Better Systems:**
    - Work to develop more responsive systems among services providers and officials to speed up processes (such as getting IDs).
    - Develop and document systems of support for survivors that models a better continuum of care and shows preparedness should funding become available for forced marriage.
    - Develop more universal and stronger intake processes that identify forced marriage more accurately and work to engrain these new processes in the intake process of agencies.
    - Create better processes for survivors such as: ESL in shelters, language services 24/7, a local person to contact when coming from another country, develop a logo or way for people to identify a service that is purposefully responsive to forced marriage (a participant suggested a symbol or sticker).

- **Housing:**

- Using the leadership of a known agency working within the field of Forced Marriage, such as Supportive Housing of Waterloo, advocate for and develop more responsive housing- including transitional housing.
- Work to advocate and address barriers to receiving priority status on housing.
- Document and highlight the areas to which shelters work outside of their mandate or funding to support survivors in order to identify potential areas for future funding.
- Work to enhance community supports available to participants post-shelter when housing is obtained.

- **Income:**
  - Advocate for and explore further financial opportunities or partnerships to meet the needs of survivor's given the complexity of their needs.

- **Service Navigation:**
  - Develop a deeper understanding of how to better organize and share where services are available and build from existing models in other countries.
  - Explore the idea of a toll free number for support and service navigation.
  - Explore the possibility of paid staff positions (such as case managers/community developers) to help survivors navigate and access services and to create efficient roads of support in the community.

- **Survivor's Groups/ Peer support:**
  - Develop a greater capacity for peer support through the development of support groups, peer workers and other opportunities.
  - Work to better encompass peer roles in the formal support work being done around forced marriage in the community.

- **Training/Awareness Building:**
  - Continue to seek out funded opportunities to create training for service providers on forced marriage, intersectionality, trauma and anti-oppression.
  - Continue to seek out and develop prevention and awareness building opportunities to connect with at-risk communities to strengthen their understanding of forced marriage .

- Seek out opportunities to train and educate informal supports to strengthen the opportunities for intervention, particularly in situations where formal services are not being accessed.
- Seek out opportunities to educate people in positions of authority around forced marriage and how to intervene. This should be particularly focused on teachers/staff in schools.
- Work to raise general community awareness through campaigns such as that which the I Do! Project did on local transit.
- Work to create materials that help survivors identify their forced marriage and understand next steps in addressing their experience of forced marriage (one participant suggested information like this could be useful in packages given to immigrants when they land).

- **Research and Build Knowledge:**
  - Build off of this research and create a stronger understanding about what specifically did not work for participants when accessing services.
  - Further explore the multi-generational impact of forced marriage to better understand forced marriages ties to family violence as well as long-term service needs.
  - Conduct an audit of informal processes to better understand the gaps in services and how to make effective processes part of systemic change.
  - Encourage policy reviews of the most utilized services where barriers were experienced to explore opportunities for policy updates and development that increases the service communities' capacity to support survivors.
  - Develop a better understanding of the underground or hidden areas of forced marriage, particularly forced marriages that are not identified as such or exposed. This will help in developing a stronger understanding of where to focus awareness and advocacy efforts as well as in developing more visibility and more accurate statistics on the number of cases of forced marriage versus focusing just on those forced marriages that come forward.

- **Develop a Formal Forced Marriage Entity in the GTA**
  - Explore what a funded specific agency or arm of an agency could look like that focused specifically on supporting survivors and building capacity among agencies for stronger and more responsive approaches.
  - Conduct research to explore models in other communities and cities to develop this idea from a best practices lens.

Conclusion

The recommendations highlighted above are etched in the need for increased awareness and capacity in supporting survivors of forced marriage. Through this research it has become clear that forced marriage is a unique issue that is slowly becoming more recognized and that the issue requires attention and considerable focus because it does not fit typical models of support that exist in the violence sector. There is a need to formalize and build on community collaborations, to create stronger and more responsive paths of service and to challenge all levels of government and community organizations to respond with the conviction needed to take disclosures, experiences and informal procedures from the underground and incorporate them into structural change. There are no shortage of ideas and directions to work from as a result of this research, but the hope is that regardless of what direction of action is explored, or who leads it, that this research both helps to encourage advancement to be more responsive to survivors as well as celebrates the current system of support that is aiming to ensure survivors do not fall victim to the voids in the system. This research will allow community builders, policy makers, service providers, champions and leaders alike to frame their work with a stronger understanding of the experiences and needs of survivors, those at-risk and community champions.

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