

Conference on Forced Marriage

9th December 2009 - Burnley Football Club, Turf Moor, Burnley

This taster event evolved from the launch of the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 207 which came into force on 25th November 2008.

Organised by Burnley Borough Council, Rossendale Borough Council, Pendle Borough Council, Lancashire Constabulary, Primary Care Trust, Watson Ramsbottom Solicitors, East Lancashire Women's Refuge Association and Safenet the aim of the conference is to raise awareness of Forced Marriage and associated issues. In doing so agencies learned how to deal with disclosure, what to do next and what support is available.

Naveed Ahmad, Cohesion Officer, Burnley Borough Council hosted the event and introduced the speakers - tying all the different aspects together.

Mike Waite, representative of Burnley Action Partnership Social and Community Cohesion Group presented the Burnley context and how confidence about talking through difficult subjects such as Forced Marriage has grown in Burnley. Burnley Action Partnership supported this conference, which shows Burnley is moving forward and building up a culture of open discussion.

Sameem Ali presented the issue from a survivor's perspective and explained the difference between arranged marriage (consent of both parties) and forced marriage (no consent from either party or one party). A short film depicting Sameem's experiences was shown. Sameem explained that forced marriage does not happen over night. There is a link with child abuse and domestic abuse and therefore should be linked into safeguarding policies already in place. Sameem tells her story to show the true face of forced marriage and it's effects. Schools are encouraged to ask questions should pupils not return from holidays/breaks. Sameem wrote about her experiences in her book 'Belonging' and told the conference that she thought she would be 'healed' once the book was finished. Sameem concluded that emotional scars never heal and appealed to delegates not to let anyone else go through what she went through.

Dr Sohail Bhatti presented the community perspective. Marriage is seen as a social service in some cultures and creates good bonds, the glue that holds cultures and society together. The right to pursue happiness is not seen as a priority in Eastern cultures and if relatives are poor you are under an obligation to help. This country is seen as 'rich' and you will be regarded as rich by relatives living in other countries. As far as Islam is concerned forced marriage is wrong. Dr Bhatti gave several examples of the Prophet Mohammed's teachings. There is lots of confusion in the community regarding religion and pride e.g. 'honour must be upheld'; faith is an excuse. Leaders of the community must be encouraged to build trust and confidence with agencies. 'Parachuting' in and out does not help and feels like it is imposed on the community. Capacity building within the community, work with Mosques, encouraging community ownership to resolve issues, is recommended. Develop new leaders and challenge the old. Work in a multi agency way, together. Understand the games played within communities and be aware of clans/families and not just reaching those networks but striving to reach the wider community.

Rachel Horman presented the legal context. Rachel has set up a dedicated domestic abuse team to meet demand, which includes forced marriage. New legislation was launched on 25th November 2008, International Women's Day and is a step in the right direction. 86 Forced Marriage Orders have been issued nationally; Rachel has personally been involved in 8 in Blackburn (which is 10% of the national figure). 30 Orders have been set up ready to go to court then clients back out for numerous reasons e.g. isolation from family, community, friends; it's a huge decision. There are 10 courts in the UK with specialist judges dealing with Forced marriage Orders. Blackburn County



Court is the only one in Lancashire. Forced Marriage Orders stipulate whatever is needed to protect the client (a copy of an Order was included in the delegates pack). The Orders are similar to injunctions i.e. family are not to threaten or intimidate, client's passport is handed in to court (foreign and English). Legislation makes clear that emotional abuse/emotional blackmail is also in breach of a Forced Marriage Order. Breach of an Order is not yet a criminal offence and needs to be brought into line with Domestic Abuse legislation. An application for a Forced Marriage Order can be made without the client's consent, however agencies need to be aware of the impact on the client. Social Services are the only agency at the moment that can apply for an Order without the court's consent, though any agency can make an application with the court's consent.

Justin Srivastava talked about the Police specialist units for domestic abuse and forced marriage based in Burnley, Blackburn and Preston. The rest of Lancashire is covered under the Public Protection Unit. Dedicated officers and outreach workers deal with a large amount of cases and in certain areas carry mobile phones that are available 24 hours a day. Forced marriage and honour-based violence are linked with domestic violence policies within Lancashire Constabulary. The community has confidence in agencies in Burnley therefore Forced marriage is better reported in this area. Reporting procedure was changed in 2005 so there was a huge increase in reports. Triggers for investigations into forced marriage include: missing persons enquiries, domestic abuse, assaults, false imprisonment, rape, child abuse, murder, suicide, harassment, threats to kill. Justin is joint chair of the new strategy group and is working towards delivering the action plan to improve support and response to victims.

Bev Taylor and Lisa Moore from the Pennine Hate Crime and Diversity Unit presented a case study giving examples of the huge challenges faced when investigating and prosecuting. Lisa and Bev are part of a team which is dedicated to dealing with the issue of Forced Marriage/Honour Based Violence in Burnley, Pendle & Rossendale and deal with many cases. Burnley College and schools contact the team should pupils not return after a break/holiday. Beverley explained that there is no 'one size fits all' when dealing with these cases. All have to be treated individually and sensitively whilst keeping in mind a criminal offence may have occurred and arrests may have to be made (sometimes against the victim's wishes).

Louise Howorth is Burnley's Domestic Violence Co-ordinator and works within the Multi Agency Problem Solving (MAPS) Team at Burnley Borough Council. Louise's remit is to raise awareness of domestic abuse and of the services available in Burnley. Domestic Abuse Awareness Training is available for frontline staff and managers. There are plans to deliver dedicated courses next year on The Effects on Children of Domestic Abuse and Dealing with Disclosure. Louise advised delegates that all have an important role to play and should observe the 'One Chance Rule': You may only get one chance to speak to a victim – one chance to save a life. If you walk away that one chance may be wasted and a life may be lost. Guidance, booklets, posters etc are available on www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage. Help and support are available to assist with disclosure: Safenet 07866510728 ELWRA 01282 414130.

Sarah Regan delivers training on the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC). Information on victims who are at a high risk of homicide/serious assault is shared between various agencies at the conferences held twice a month. MARAC is available to all adult victims even if there is no recourse to public funds. The conferences can be useful if the victim has not obtained indefinite leave to remain. 15/30 cases are dealt with each month with the Police taking the lead and chairing the conferences. 70% of all referrals are from the Police, 30% from other agencies. It is important that all disclosures are acted upon. Agency staff can be trained in how to deal with disclosure. It is everybody's responsibility to safeguard the well being of victims.

Helen Gauder is the manager of East Lancashire Women's Refuge Association (ELWRA) and referred to ELWRA's Annual Report for two stories from women who had experienced forced



marriage issues. ELWRA offer a range of services from safe, temporary accommodation to community based services. Last year over 1,000 women and children were helped by ELWRA staff. Some services offered to survivors are future risk assessments, plans for future safety, safe housing, legal issues, help with benefits issues, immigration/visa issues, etc, etc. It is important that agencies know what services are available.

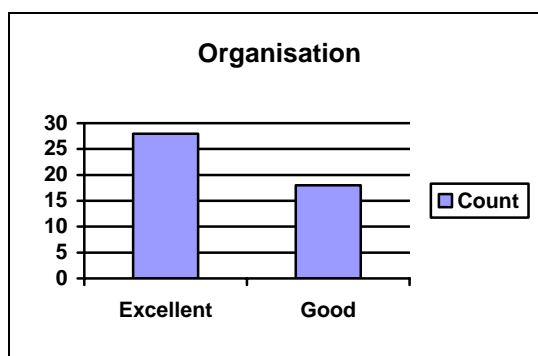
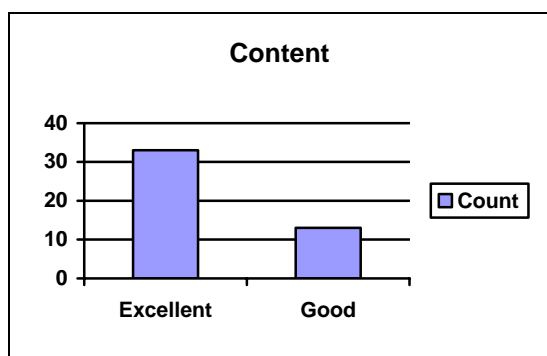
A question and answer session was held with Rachel Horman, Sameem Ali and Justin Srivastava on the panel:

- What happens to victims who have no recourse to public funds?
 - Legal representatives can deal with cases. There is a huge gap and the Government is aware. Pressure is being applied to change the law.
- If an arrest is made against a client's wishes could that not be counter-productive as far as community confidence in the Police is concerned?
 - First priority is to preserve life and it is a risk that is not taken lightly. Each case is dealt with individually.
- If the community are aware then there could be repercussions for the person helping.
 - A lot of time is spent around safety planning – not just for the victim. The Forced Marriage Protection Order could state that it is forbidden to intimidate the client and this could include intimidation of the support worker.
- Awareness needs raising within the BME community – Imams could be used?
 - Strategic work is being done so the same message is being sent out by all agencies. There are plans for community events such as this one. If challenged by community that it doesn't happen, advice is to challenge and talk about it openly.
- Forced marriage is not on the Safeguarding Children agenda or the strategy for schools.
 - Lots of work is being done with Lancashire County Council to raise awareness and get the forced marriage/honour based violence agenda into schools e.g. PHSE classes.
- What is being done to build relationships with the community as there is speculation and doubt that agencies are working on this issue?
 - Lots of work is being carried out with communities in different ways to access the whole of the community. There has been an increase in referrals and reported though there is not a true picture yet. Using the media and streaming into current engagement practices offers more opportunities to get the message out.

Delegates were encouraged to approach the speakers and network with other agencies over lunch.

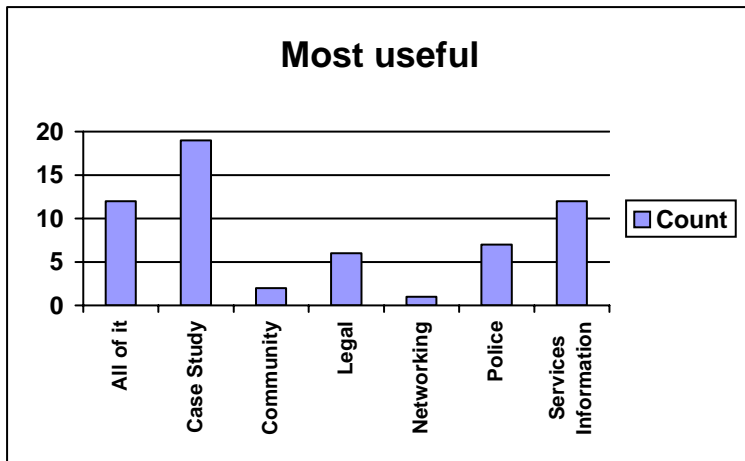
Delegates completed evaluation forms and a suggestion/comments board – results as follows.

Overall rating



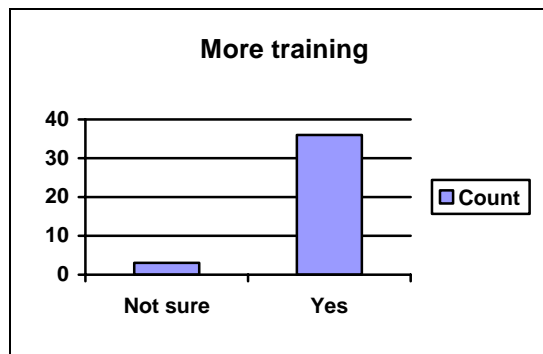
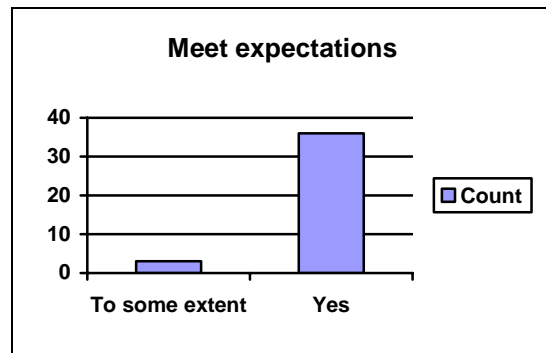
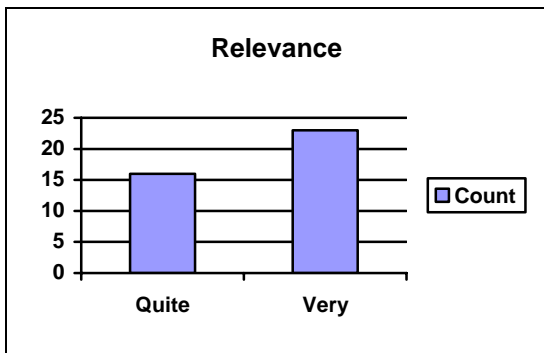


Content and Usefulness



Overwhelmingly delegates found that because Sameem shared her experiences it put the rest of the information into context. Hearing about forced marriage from a survivor's perspective had a big impact on delegates.

Relevance, meeting expectations and more training



Delegates found the conference was relevant to their work and met their expectations. Most delegates would be interested in follow-up training.

General Suggestions and Comments

Suggestions:

- Would have been useful to have the official guidance to take away –
(A request was made to Forced Marriage Unit prior to the event)
- Copies of the presentations would have been useful
- Would like to know more about how the MAPS Team work together e.g. case study
- Training in basic awareness and key points to look out for would be useful for call centre staff
- Moderated forum on internet around forced marriage and honour based violence
- Workshops with case studies needed
- Would have been useful to know who the other delegates were and have a chance to brainstorm with them in workshops to plan how we could work smarter and fill some gaps.
- Regular notification of events such as this.
- Training on what to do should disclosure occur training
- Excellent – would have liked to hear a male survivor relate his experiences.
- Train 16-18 year olds trained in MARAC procedures
- Where you're from on delegate name badges
- Extend training to a full day

Comments:

- The 'one chance' rule really hit home
- Good balance of information
- Interesting information that I wasn't aware of
- Questions were irrelevant as most issues had already been addressed
- DVD was a good idea – rather than being 'talked at' all morning
- Good community engagement and very pertinent
- Reassuring to hear the message from the top down – inspiring DCI
- Really pleased I came
- Good mix and varied content
- Kept to time – well done!
- Useful delegates' pack
- Very well organised and delivered with professionalism and passion.
- Will be making contact for MARAC training for my team
- Good idea to include risk assessment in delegates' pack
- Training will help to recognise any students in trouble
- I work in Early Years so Forced Marriage is not something that we are really aware of.
- I'm a childcare practitioner and work with children aged 3-4. Do not come across domestic violence
- Working at a local college I see a lot of young people presenting this issue
- I am now aware of the help available and also the actions and severity of domestic abuse and forced marriage.
- More funds for domestic violence services needed – more help for victims needed

**Thanks to all who contributed before, during and after the conference.
Thanks also to all the delegates for attending, engaging, commenting and suggesting.**