**Call for inputs to inform the report by the Secretary-General on progress towards ending child, early and forced marriage worldwide**

**Introduction**

Dr Rowland Seymour is an Assistant Professor in Mathematics at the University of Birmingham and UKRI Future Leaders Fellow. Dr Helen McCabe is an Associate Professor in Political Theory at the University of Nottingham and leads the work on forced marriage at the University’s Rights Lab. Professor Caroline Bradbury-Jones is a Professor of Gender Based Violence at the University of Birmingham. We are submitting evidence on forced marriage data collection in the UK.

**1. What efforts have been made or are planned to address the recommendations of the latest report of the Secretary-General on the issue of child, early and forced marriage (A/77/282)?**

We led a project funded by the UK Government’s Home Office to develop a method to estimate the prevalence of forced marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting in England and Wales. This project goes some way towards meeting the recommendation (p) of A/77/282 “Expand evidence-based interventions concerning child, early and

forced marriage through regular data collection, including the analysis of trends

and understanding of root causes, and enhance the focus on evaluative and

evidence-based research to assess the effectiveness of measures, with context-

specific perspectives”.

Previous measurement tools have been developed within a variety of different contexts and are based on a range of different assumptions including, for example, how data is collected, or how stigmatised survivors of abuse are. The range of different information sources, combined with the hidden nature of crimes – particularly since they frequently take place within the family unit – makes it very difficult to compare data and build a comprehensive picture.

The project started with the researchers working with key stakeholders, including government agencies, third sector organisations, academics, and community organisations, to identify where information is available and what measurement methods could be used to tap into this information. This information was fed into the development of a comprehensive measurement tool that can be used to determine the prevalence of these hidden crimes.

The project concluded in February 2024 with a report to the Home Office making recommendations on if it is possible to measure the prevalence of forced marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting in the England and Wales.

**3. What kind of approaches and tools have been used to collect disaggregated data on child, early and forced marriages, as well as informal unions?**

In the UK, what disaggregated data on forced marriage exists comes from helplines to safeguard victims. The Government’s Forced Marriage Unit was set up to safeguard victims of forced marriage and lead on forced marriage policy and outreach. The Unit runs a helpline where victims and those involved in safeguarding can ask for support. The Unit releases statistics annually summarising the number of cases it dealt with and broad characteristics of the victims. In 2021, 74% of victims were female. In 2021, 51% (82) of the cases they dealt with concerned those aged 21 and under, and 18% (21) concerned victims aged 15 and under. However, the method the Unit uses to collect and publish statistics has changed in 2019, 2022, and 2021. This means it is not possible to compare statistics over these years and understand what characteristics make individuals vulnerable to forced marriage. Since 2022, the Unit has taken steps to standardise collection practices over different years, which is a welcome step.

Karma Nirvana is a charity tackling honour-based abuse in the UK. They run a helpline for victims of honour-based abuse and those involved in safeguarding. In 2022/23, they received calls about 536 victims of forced marriage. 14% of cases were facing immediate risk of forced marriage, and around one in ten cases featured a threat of forced marriage overseas. In quarter 1 of 2023/24, they dealt with 30 cases of child marriage and 59 cases of forced marriage. This is the only public data in the UK that disaggregates child marriage from forced marriage.

Helpline data is an important source of data about forced marriage, but it requires victims or those around them to actively report a case of forced marriage. This limits data to those who know about the helplines and who have the means and courage to call a helpline. Due to the limited volume, disaggregated data is not always possible as it could identify individuals. However, Karma Nirvana’s steps to disaggregate marriage status by over and under 18 years old are necessary step forward.

**6. What other innovative strategies have been used to address child, early and forced marriage, as well as informal unions and collect data on this practice in your country?**

We are developing innovative mathematical methods to map the risk of forced marriage at community level in the UK. This has informed local strategies to address child, forced and early marriage. Local level data allows the development of targeted safeguarding interventions and policies; however, there is no publicly available data at such a level. Additionally, victims are supported by a range of independent services (e.g. law enforcement, social services, voluntary agencies), so no one service has a complete picture of the issue.

We carry out comparative judgement studies in counties in the UK as this allowed us to collect evidence from a wide range of service providers in the county in an efficient and low-cost manner. In a comparative judgement study, people who work on the frontline of social care are shown pairs of areas in their community and asked which has a higher rate of forced marriage. This allows us to collect data from people on the frontline without collecting personally identifying information. An example of the digital data collection interface is shown in Figure 1.

A screenshot of a map

Description automatically generated

Figure 1: The data collection tool for mapping forced marriage at local levels

We have run data collection activities in five UK counties so far. The results for the risk of forced marriage at ward level in Nottinghamshire are shown on the right. This is the first-time local level data about forced marriage in the UK has been produced (Seymour et. al., 2023).

Figure 2: A map of Nottinghamshire, UK, colour coded by risk of forced marriage. Red areas have the highest risk.

We have worked with Nottinghamshire County Council to develop a training programme for staff based on these methods. This is a continuous professional development course. So far, we have trained 130 public sector staff, including: teachers, probation and courtroom staff, social workers, and health professionals. Feedback from the course shows the attendees have much greater awareness of forced marriage, and are more confident in identifying and safeguarding against forced marriage.

This project shows that innovative ways collecting data at the local level can increase awareness among professionals and give them confidence in tackling forced and early marriage.

This work is funded through the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council [EP/R513283/1] and a UK Research and Innovation Future Leaders Fellowship [MR/X034992/1].

**Bibliography**

Forced Marriage Unit. 2022. Forced Marriage Unit Statistics 2021. GOV.UK. Retrieved April 21, 2023, from [https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/forced-marriage-unit- statistics-2021/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2021](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/forced-marriage-unit-%20statistics-2021/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2021)

Seymour, R. G., Nyarko-Agyei, A., McCabe, H. R., Severn, K., Kypraios, T., Sirl, D., Taylor, A. 2023. arXiv:2212.01202. Comparative Judgement Modeling to Map Forced Marriage at Local Levels