

None — British Spouses

The Association of Indian Women and Indian Workers Association have observed through its advice surgery, that many none-British spouses are living at the mercy of their in-laws because they had to wait for a year- now two years before they can apply for indefinite leave to remain in Britain. Moreover they are not aware of their rights and where to seek advice. In the absence of financial support from the state many suffer financial hardship. The violence targeted at them has forced them to try to commit suicide or harm themselves while others suffer severe mental health problems.

They are pressured by their parental families to continue to remain married and try to work out their marriage even by means of subservience. Some of the stories told by the young women are as following:

- 1) Coercion to terminate pregnancy**
- 2) Broken limbs**
- 3) Locking in solitary confinement in the house**
- 4) Not allowed to go out independently including a visit to their G.P.**
- 5) Thrown out of the house in late cold evenings**
- 6) Financial deprivation**
- 7) Physical and mental torture**
- 8) Verbal abuse**
- 9) Threats to deportation**

A majority of these young women are kept in the dark about their rights. They are not allowed to meet anyone so that they don't find out where to seek advice and support. An application for indefinite leave is not made in time and hence they have breached the condition of temporary visa that means they are liable to deportation.

By the time these spouses finally leave the matrimonial relationship, they are already mentally damaged and suffering depression. Both men and women equally suffer the hardship.

They however are given an opportunity by the Home Office to make an application for permission to remain in Britain for which they have to provide evidence of domestic violence. A majority of the time such evidence is lost while trying to preserve the marriage. They have not told anyone including their G.P.s. Some even have been admitted into hospital with

broken limbs. Again they told the medical professional that the injury incurred by accident.

Many Non-British Spouses primarily young non-British brides, are living in misery of violent relationship because they had to wait for one year that has been extended to two years (April 2004), before gaining indefinite leave to remain in Britain. The extension has been introduced in less than a month of its introduction and without consultation with campaigning institutions like JCWI and gone against the advice by the Joint Human Rights Committee. The Government has taken this and further steps, such as for non-EEA couples to obtain a licence from one of 70 new special marriage registrars designated by the Home Secretary, to crack down the increasing numbers of sham marriages. The Indian Workers Association and the Association of Indian women believes this rule could disproportionately affect people from black and ethnic minorities as it does not apply to Church of England and the marriages in Ireland and Scotland. However the Government's claim is not based on analysed evidence and rather appears to be playing a political card to please the oppositions particularly the far Right. A Government Minister has admitted that it is impossible to obtain accurate information about scale of Sham marriages. The Government's strategy appears to be intending to reintroduce the Primary Purpose Rule in the name of protection of Asian women from forced marriages.

The extension of probationary period means the misery from difficult and breaking relationship has to be endured even longer and an added year of uncertainty to their immigration status.

We demand that:

- a) Repeal of probationary period and the Non-British spouses to be given indefinite leave to remain in Britain.**
- b) The non-British spouses must be given financial support by the state at the time of marriage breakdown.**
- c) A package of information in relevant languages should be available at the time of interview with an Immigration Officer. The pack should include the spouse's rights in Britain and the institutions they can seek advice and support, should they face matrimonial difficulties.**
- d) Those who perpetrate physical or psychological violence or hardship of any nature must be prosecuted.**

