

Derby Consultation Events On Forced Marriage “A Wrong Not A Right”

Background

The Forced Marriage Unit that is jointly supported by The Foreign & Commonwealth & Home Office funded Karma Nirvana to consult on the document “Forced Marriage A Wrong Not A Right.”

In May 2005 Karma Nirvana established a Forced Marriage Working group made up of statutory & voluntary sector organisations whose key objective is to take forward an action plan which deals with many issues relating to forced marriage one being issues of prevention & education. Members from this group representing The Derby Safeguarding Children Board, Connexions and Education worked jointly with Karma Nirvana to organise the consultation events as follows.

A leaflet was produced and this was widely distributed amongst the sectors below.

Events

Professionals
Victims & Survivors
Community Engagement
Males Events
University of Derby

Consultation took place with 2 schools engaging with young people aged from 16-18 years old male & female groups.

Format

It was felt important that the audience were aware of national and local perspectives as the knowledge base of these issues may vary to overcome this it was agreed that 2 members would offer presentations with an option to ask questions and the following format was used:

Presentation 1

Foreign & Commonwealth presentation on the national picture of forced marriage and the work of the Forced marriage Unit.

Presentation 2

Karma Nirvana presentation on the local picture based on the work of the project.

Following this the audience were split into groups to facilitate discussions on the Home Office questions. A total of 11 questions were asked and all members were given the opportunity to add any additional information. The Home Office literature was given at all events as well as inviting all to respond independently by returning the self-addressed questionnaire a total of 250 distributed across the events as well as additional literature being distributed across agencies.

Publicity

All the events were locally & regionally publicised through:

Radio Derby

Ram FM Drive Time that is prime time hearing

Derby Evening Telegraph undertook a 3 page article on the issues and published all events the week starting the consultation.

Asian network

Publicised at all Karma Nirvana speaking events

All events were well documented and where a flip chart was used there were written up verbatim and are attached. The following are an overall reflection from the notes taken that facilitated by discussion groups.

Professionals

4 Groups of Professionals

How many people do you know have been forced into marriage?

6, 8, 10 & 25 over the last 18 months.

All stated that they had known of cases of forced marriage and many stated that more were suspected cases. One group stated that they knew of cases on a personal level.

How old were they?

Average age ranged from 14-20 years old.

Were they men or women?

Majority women and a minority of men, many expressed knowing men on a personal level one group member raised the issue of gay men being forced into marriage to protect the family name.

A point was raised that many of the cases were directed from Health Visitors Services.

Which countries did their families come from?

Majority Pakistan, secondly India 5 cases from Africa and 1 from Bangladesh.

What are the disadvantages to creating a specific offence of forcing someone to marry?

Key Points from all:

Would it deter victims from reporting? Key recognition that it was a hidden issue and this may further isolate the victim.

Difficult to gain evidence as majority felt emotional abuse would be difficult to prove. If extensive legal proceedings sought how wide would offences go within a family and would this be a deterrent to victims who might only want restricted action? Some people felt that a law might make the victim reluctant to speak to the Police/Professionals.

Advantages

Sends out a strong message of FM being unacceptable.
Act as a deterrent.
Increase accountability.
Strengthen the victim's voice.
A law may lessen the impact of honour-based violence/izzat.
A law would recognise the victims experience as legitimate.
Make process of protection occur earlier such as physical or sexual abuse.
Take guilt away from the victim.
Give clarity to the issue of forced marriage.
Give Police more powers.
An offence in its own right will support agencies deal with this matter and create more accountability.
A law would support the guidelines hence schools etc.

On balance should offence be created?

Group 1 –Yes
Group 2 – Yes
Group 3 – Majority vote Yes
Group 4 – Majority vote Yes

All stated that law exists however they are often not acknowledged as being linked to forced marriage therefore the issue may be overlooked.

Question 5 Options

Many discussions around the issues surrounding the options and no one agreed with option C. The majority considered A the best option following with B & D as coinciding with each other.

Question 5 Overseas

Need to use immigration checks/ interviews to identify possible victims and perpetrators and that this measure needed to be publicised to protect British spouses who are expected to make overseas applications.
Would be difficult to gather evidence.

Question 7 Who should be prosecuted?

All family members involved but need for a "tariff" of offences?
Anyone who knows about it?

Those most responsible including extended family members or the so-called “go between” that normally exist within the arrangement.
Registrar if they knew it was a forced marriage?

Question 8 Penalties

Graded and proportionate to the particular offence – no limit but forced marriage should be added to the added factor to extend the likely offences and the maximum offences should apply.

Fines would not be good.

Imprisonment but could not give length of time?

Question 9 How effective have the Government been in communicating message?

Unanimously stated that the Government message had been very poorly communicated and many stated bar today they had not heard of the work of the FMU?

Concerns of situations in other parts of the UK as individuals drove FM in Derby.

Question 10

TV campaigns.

Radio including Asian networks.

Information at places of worship/involve Religious leaders.

Anywhere that young people attend.

Soaps.

Within the School curriculum.

Question 11

Support networks offering understanding including victim's voice.

Sticker on back of toilets.

Involve young people.

Ensure housing services understand their role?

Confidence building courses for victims.

Giving people a choice of culturally appropriate support.

Young people need more choices and access to survivors.

University of Derby

A presentation was given on the national & local issues to a total of 48 students and the consultation documents were explained. All students were given a copy of the Home Office literature and the opportunity to take a questionnaire to send directly to FMU.

Students ranged from 18-14 years old with a balanced mix of male and female. The majority were aware of cases of FM and after the event 4 cases were dealt with and since then Karma Nirvana have seen an increase in support calls from students.

The majority felt there needed to be a specific offence through a show of hands and no one knew of the work of the Government. Majority discussion revolved around the victim's perspectives. Most felt that arranged marriages had an element of pressure that must not be overlooked.

Attached Events:

Male Voices Summary – 25 attended

Very well attended ages from 14-40 years old. On average half the men who attended stated that they knew at least 5 friends at school who were being forced into a marriage and the key indicator was the changes in personality.

None of the group knew of the work of the FMU and felt strongly about this needing to be a priority to reach them and others. All talked about how the emotional abuse was great as the sense of duty to the family was greater and that arranged marriages also have an element of force and that this needs to be considered.

All felt strongly that the male experience is often missed and that there needed to be specific support for male victims, an equivalent project to Karma Nirvana was highlighted as a need for men. They felt that they would be happy to be involved in such an initiative and become involved in raising awareness of forced marriages within the community and amongst their peers as well becoming involved in supporting men.

Community Engagement – 20 attended held at local school

This event received opposition locally in that Karma Nirvana volunteers were restricted from putting up leaflets in the heart of the Asian community. Some volunteers were directly negated from being involved in such an issue and some were shunned. However did manage to get major supermarkets, GP practices, Dental Surgeries, local schools and community centres.

The number in attendance was not very well represented from the community even though this was a widely advertised through media. The consultation event continued with the few community representatives present.

Victims and Survivors

All in attendance had a clear understanding of the issues of forced marriage and the majority knew of others who had been through cases of forced marriage. None of the

women knew before accessing Karma Nirvana about the work of the FMU. The overall feeling was that an offence needed to happen with consideration for the victim before any action and after any prosecution considerations. Please see attached document.

School feedback – total of 30 children

All the children involved stated that they knew of the issues as a reality in the lives of friends they knew and the majority of them were girls, although males were stated. Subsequently Karma Nirvana had received increased referrals from schools and since the event has been supporting 4 children aged 16-18 years.

There was a real fear of getting parents into trouble and a great acknowledgement of the emotional blackmail they experience as linked to issues of honour. All talked about the respect of the family and the wider community as something they had to protect. None of those involved knew of the work of the FMU or the purple leaflet until Karma Nirvana presented it and felt strongly that this needed to be communicated safely.

Many of the young girls felt that when they tried to talk about the issue of FM they were not taken seriously. Some girls who had attempted to leave home stated that they felt passed from pillar to post and that often agencies took the route of talking to their parents and it was often the parents that they believed over the child (4 specific cases in event). Many stated that unless they could show physical signs of abuse they would not be believed and one girl stated that she has run away so many times only to be let down by services that in the end she went home.

Issues of the lack of importance placed on education were as many felt there was no point being in school as their lives were mapped out for them on average 18 girls felt this.

Please see attached document.

Summary

Overall the Derby consultation has highlighted that the majority consulted are aware of issues of FM as a personal consequence or as an issue that exist within their profession or community. The issue of honour was key to all the Asian individuals involved and acted as a barrier to asking for support and was linked to the abuse.

All of the consultation events highlighted the issues of arranged marriages as not being void from some pressure and that this needed to be a consideration when assisting young people.

A clear message from all events was that they were not aware of the work of the Government were undertaking until Karma Nirvana had communicated the message. All young people involved did not know anything about the work of the FMU and has never seen the purple leaflet.

The community event was not well attended by members of the community and Karma Nirvana felt that this was a message in itself due to the opposition and that community involvement was key to tackling this issue. All in attendance at every event stated that

leaders needed to send out a message and the government needed to send out a stronger message of unacceptability of FM as well as help available. All felt that males needed to be included not just women and that there was not sufficient support for male victims who faced other issues as males within the family.

Note that this report will be fed back to the Derby Forced Marriage working group with a view to support the implementation of the action plan.