

Missing from Discourse: South Asian Young Women and Sexual Exploitation

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Presentation outline (1)

- Present a critique of 'exit' as an approach to forced marriage.
- Suggest that the intersectionality of age, gender and ethnicity leads to particular experiences for BME young women who choose to go missing.
- Suggest risk assessment focuses on honour-based violence to the exclusion of other forms of harm.

Presentation outline (2)

- Argue that fleeing from harm in one community does not guarantee that young women will be safe in another.
- Illustrate this through considering the link between going missing and child sexual exploitation.
- Conclude victims of forced marriage who choose to go missing are a group at risk of child sexual exploitation.

Why important? (1)

- Recognition of the importance of connecting missing persons with associated public protection issues.
- Government has recently changed the domestic violence definition to include 16-17 year olds.
- Need to understand more about the experience of BME young people who go missing and their needs.

Why important? (2)

- Addresses criticism that CSE literature is 'implicitly centred' on young white women as victims; assumed to be a homogenous group with similarities in experience across racial and ethnic boundaries (Ward and Patel, 2006; Cockbain, 2013).

A word on ethnicity

- Presentation draws on literature related to South Asian women – reflects large community in UK.
- Research confirms that children of all ethnic minority backgrounds experience CSE (CEOP/OCC).
- Careful not to contribute to emergent racial stereotypes i.e. problem of Asian men targeting white girls (Cockbain, 2013).

The 'right' to exit (1)

- Domestic violence victims encouraged to 'exit' abusive situations i.e. flee to refuges.
- Adults have 'the right' to go missing – able to access financial resources and shield themselves from harm (Kiepal et al. 2012).
- Children inherently vulnerable so missing behaviour framed within a deficit focused, problem model vs. a form of resilience.

The 'right' to exit (2)

- Exit as a strategy imposes responsibility on victim – does not address the power relations that generate individual cases (Shachar, 2001).
- Women often having to choose between individual rights or cultural belonging.
- Results in on-going risk of harm to the individual and a focus on protection i.e. not to disclose location of domestic violence refuge.

Age, gender, ethnicity (1)

- Overlap in the profiles of forced marriage victims and those who go missing; young women aged between 12 and 17 years of age.
- Picture in relation to ethnicity is more mixed; research data indicates that the majority of under-18s who go missing are white.
- Self-reported surveys consistently indicate significantly lower rates of running away amongst young people of South Asian origin.

Age, gender, ethnicity (2)

- Young women discouraged from leaving because if subsequently found by their families, are at even greater risk of violence (Brandon & Hafez, 2008).
- More likely to continue coping with a difficult home situation and only leave as a last resort (Izzidien, 2008).
- May be connected to a high degree of surveillance making it more difficult for them to leave (Franks, 2004).

Age, gender, ethnicity (3)

- Other research suggests a more 'mixed picture' in relation to ethnicity
- Professionals suggest broadly same levels but that this behaviour may be 'less visible'.
- Biehal et al. (2003) research found that 26% of Asian young people who had gone missing did so between 13 and 17 years of age, compared to just 14 per cent of white teenagers.

Running from forced marriage (1)

- All young people are understood to experience challenges associated with the development of independence and autonomy in respect of family relationships.
- South Asian teenagers may be subject to particularly restrictive parenting. Rejection of boyfriends/girlfriends emerges as a distinct issue for this group alongside threats of forced marriage in a minority of cases (NSPCC, 2009).

Running from forced marriage (2)

- Multi-agency practice guidelines recognise that both male and female victims of forced marriage may feel that running away is their 'only option' (HM Government, 2009; 2010).
- Working Group on Forced Marriage when politicians heard evidence of the 'plight of many young women who had runaway to escape forced marriage' (Home Office Communications Directorate, 2000:15).

Experience of missing (2)

- Networks may include people who have access to official records i.e. someone with influence within the community – councillor/MP; police; staff from benefits and tax offices; GP and dentist surgeries; schools and colleges and local housing authorities.
- Young women distrustful of statutory agencies.

Repercussions of missing incident

- Professionals highlight particular concerns for Asian young people who may suffer harsh punishment and other repercussions on returning home from a runaway incident (Stein et. al. 1994)
- Risk of abduction; intended marriage brought forward and/or take place abroad; held prisoner until 'agree' to marriage; domestic violence; honour killing.

Experience of missing (1)

- Families will go to considerable lengths to find and bring back females who have fled a forced marriage Izzidien (2008) HM Government (2009) Mol (2010)
- Use networks of people to locate the missing person; therefore young women less likely to stay with friends and family.
- Young women may move further away to avoid community networks; fear of being found may lead to successive moves.

Experience of missing (3)

- Family may use subterfuge to locate the young person; report them as missing, accuse them of theft in the belief that the police will bring the young woman home/reveal her location.
- Highlights the danger in 'missing' being an ascribed status, especially as risks related to going missing are real for both actual and 'perceived' missing incidents.

Identifying risk

- Literature shows that focus of risk is primarily on so-called forms of 'honour' based violence.
- Useful to assert a degree of commonality amongst South Asian women in terms of understanding risks and developing effective response.
- But danger of 'difference' in experiences is that it leads to essentialist and absolutist construction – collective victimhood.

What about other forms of risk?

Making culture the divisor suggests that their [victim of abuse] salvation lies in abandoning their culture and by implication adopting another. If violence against women exists in the cultures that criticise the 'other' as it clearly does, then existing cultural practices do not determine the safety of women, as in no culture are women assured freedom from violence

(Sen, 2005)

Vulnerabilities linked to CSE and FM

1. **Missing from home or care**
2. **Victim of a sexual offence**
3. Engagement in offending
4. Lacking friends from same age group
5. Repeated STIs, pregnancy, terminations, **mental health**
6. Recruiting others into exploitative situations
7. **Living in a chaotic household/history of abuse**
8. **Absent from school**
9. Excluded from school
10. **Self harm/suicide attempts**
11. **Drug or alcohol misuse**

Going missing and CSE (1)

- Successive studies show going missing is one of the primary risk indicators of CSE.
- Missing young people at risk of CSE irrespective of time away from home/caring environment.
- CYP 'pushed' from home in risky situations or 'pulled' i.e. encouraged to go missing as part of the grooming process.

Going missing and CSE (2)

Despite the fact that there is a proven link between going missing and child sexual exploitation, research and practice does not highlight sexual exploitation as a particular risk for victims of forced marriage in a UK context
i.e. British Nationals

Additive intersectionality

Thiara and Gill (2010) – criticise theory related to VAWG which seeks to 'add on' issues of ethnicity and culture rather than positioning them within existing violence against women frameworks of power and control.

Constitutive intersectionality

Understand the **experiences of BME young women** (interplay of factors such as age, gender, ethnicity) as they are **mediated** through **systems of inequality** whilst also recognising individual agency i.e. access to economic or other resources which **shape** (facilitate/restrict) the experience of **all** abused women and **define their responses** to their situations and problems accordingly.

(Gill and Thiara; Gill and Mitra-Khan, 2010)

Substantive conditions for exit

- Access to accommodation, benefits and employment (age barriers and culturally specific services).
- Trust in statutory agencies and confidentiality.
- Child protection or domestic violence response (or neither).
- Response of professionals (consent).
- Meet thresholds for risk.

Review of literature

- Extensive review of domestic violence/forced marriage, going missing/runaway and child sexual exploitation.
- Illustrates possible links between missing/CSE and forced marriage.
- Identifies only 3 pieces of research which link all three issues (even though they are all linked in policy/practice guidance).

Risk of FM due to missing and/or CSE

- Forced marriage used as a mechanism to control deviant behaviour i.e. going missing and believed to be 'sleeping around'.
- Women and girls may be at increased risk of forced marriage if they have disclosed sexual abuse, including exploitation (Kirtley, 2013).
- Forced marriage therefore used to protect against the social rejection associated with being labelled a 'prostitute'.

Risk of FM due to missing and/or CSE

Sexually exploited young people from BME backgrounds reported that their abusers controlled them through playing on fears associated with bringing shame on their families and the possibility of being threatened with forced marriage (OCC, 2012).

Possible maybes...

- In-depth study of one South Asian young **runaways** escaping **forced marriage** by Franks (2004) highlights vulnerability to **child sexual exploitation**.
- A study by Beckett (2011) notes links between **child sexual exploitation** and **going missing** and child sexual exploitation and **Forced Marriage Protection Orders** respectively.

Forced marriage, trafficking and CSE

- **Forced marriage** is synonymous with **sexual exploitation** since being forced into marriage will almost certainly result in sexual violence.
- 8 cases where girls were believed to have been **trafficked** and **forced into marriage**. 3 cases were related to British Asian girls living in the East Midlands: 2 of whom were to be married in Bangladesh, but one who was to be taken to Leicester⁷ (CEOP Strategic Assessment of Trafficking, 2010)

Forced marriage, CSE and missing

- The OCC inquiry (2012) presents the case of a 17 year old who was threatened with **forced marriage** as a result of making an allegation of sexual abuse against a family member. Following these threats she began to spend time with older males and was **moved to multiple locations by them**. She is now pregnant as a result of **sexual exploitation** experienced.

Forced marriage, missing and CSE

- Smeaton (2009) explored the experience of 'detached' children and found one case of a 15 year old sexually abused by a family friend and physically abused by his father. After threats to **force him into marriage** he **ran away** and stayed with a number of older men, **swapping sex** for accommodation.

Summary

- CSE is overlooked as a risk for victims of forced marriage who go missing.
- Risk of CSE may be amplified for some BME young women due to runaway experience.
- 'Costs' associated with disclosing CSE may be higher i.e. OCC, 2012.
- Being alert to CSE as a risk to victims of forced marriage may add to conceptualisation of risk.