

India second on list of forced marriage cases in UK

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London: India has emerged second after Pakistan in terms of countries of origin where British nationals are forced into marriage, a crime in the UK.

Forced marriage was criminalised under British law exactly one year ago and the UK's Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) said it had handled cases involving a range of different countries including Pakistan (38.3 per cent), India (7.8 per cent), Bangladesh (7.1 per cent), Afghanistan (3 per cent), Somalia (1.6 per cent), Turkey (1.1 per cent), Sri Lanka (1.1 per cent), Iran (1 per cent) and Iraq (0.7 per cent).

"We made forced marriage a crime to better protect victims and send a clear message that this brutal practice is totally unacceptable and will not be tolerated in the UK. We also hope that criminalisation will act as a deterrent," said Karen Bradley, UK minister for preventing abuse and exploitation.

"The UK is a world-leader in the fight to stamp this out, with our Forced Marriage Unit leading efforts to combat the practice both at home and abroad," she said.

Forcing someone to marry against their will is punishable by a maximum penalty of seven years' imprisonment.

"Forced marriage is different from arranged marriage. In an arranged marriage, although the families may take a leading role in arranging the marriage, the choice of whether or not to accept the arrangement remains with the prospective spouses. It is this choice which makes an arranged marriage different from a forced marriage," the FMU said.

The law is designed to help people in Britain as well as UK nationals overseas against the devastating effects of forced marriage such as physical, psychological, emotional, financial and sexual abuse including being held unlawfully captive, assaulted and raped.

The first conviction under the new legislation took place earlier this month when a 34-year-old businessman from Wales raped and imprisoned a woman, before forcing her to marry.

The cross-government FMU provided advice or support in 1,267 cases last year.

More than one in 10 cases involved victims aged under the age of 16 and nearly a fifth of cases where age was known involved victims aged between 18 and 21.

Research by Department for Children, Schools and Families in 2009 estimated that a national prevalence of reported cases of forced marriage in England was between 5,000 and 8,000.

The criminal offence works alongside Forced Marriage Protection Orders (FMPOs), which provide a specific civil remedy to prevent forced marriage and assist victims where a marriage has already taken place.

The breach of an FMPO was made a criminal offence with a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine.

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