



REPORT FROM THE EVENT 'YOUR MARRIAGE YOUR RIGHTS'

Monday 8th March 2010

**St Augustine's United Church, 41 George IV
Bridge, EDINBURGH**

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YOUR MARRIAGE YOUR RIGHTS

Foreword

Direct Approach: 'A Safer Communities Network for Minority Ethnic (ME) Women and Women of Faith'

Direct Approach is a network with a mission to empower women of minority ethnic and faith groups to bring about positive change and advance inclusion, diversity and safety within our communities.

Their stated aims are -

1. To develop the network, involving other groups that should be represented.
2. For the police to forge constructive, meaningful, ongoing contacts with a wide range of communities.
3. To find ways to attract police staff from all communities.
4. To facilitate better working partnerships between voluntary organisations & the police.
5. To collect better evidence from ME women and women from faith communities to inform police practice & balance knowledge, driving strategic change that is visible at a community level.
6. To develop a joint programme for the network.

Direct Approach was created in 2008 when it was identified that there was no platform for ME women and women of faith in Edinburgh to engage with Lothian and Borders Police at a strategic level on issues specific to ME women. At that time senior female representatives from Edinburgh and Lothians Racial Equality Council (ELREC), YWCA Roundabout and Lothian and Borders Police joined forces to improve engagement with ME women at a strategic level. Direct Approach now has membership from ELREC, Lothian and Borders Police, Sikh Sanjog, Beyond the Veil, Nari Kallyan Shangho, Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre, Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group, Shakti Women's Aid, Saheliya, Young Saheliya, SCORE Scotland, Africa Centre, Dignity and Research Forum, Annandale Street Mosque, Blackhall Mosque, Bield/ Trust Housing, Young Scot Access all Areas, Pakheza, CORE (Community Organisation for Racial Equality), Edinburgh Women and Children's Group, and The Multicultural Family Base.

YOUR MARRIAGE YOUR RIGHTS

Introduction

From early on after the inception of Direct Approach it was identified that a key issue facing ME women within the community was Forced Marriage and Honour Based Violence.

It was, however, recognised that this was an exceptionally complex area and any work in the field should be approached with a high level of sensitivity.

Purpose

The purpose of the day was to arrange a community engagement event run by Direct Approach. Members of the planning team were representatives from Edinburgh Lothian Race Equality Council, AMINA Muslim Women's Resource Centre, Shakti Women's Aid and Lothian and Borders Police. The main aims of the event were –

- To assist women in communities particularly affected by the issue of HBV and Forced Marriage to develop and increase their own awareness of options/ support open to them in Forced Marriage situations, thereby making them safer as a result.
- To facilitate dialogue between women from communities, thereby increasing the awareness for professional agencies of barriers to women seeking support. This should in turn enable agencies to support these women and families more effectively.
- To increase sustained liaison between police, NHS, education and women's groups staff after the event on this issue.

Programme

“YOUR MARRIAGE YOUR RIGHTS”

0930hrs – 1000hrs – Coffee, registration, networking and placing children in crèche

1000hrs – 1015hrs – Introduction and Definition of ‘Arranged Marriage’, Nina Giles, Edinburgh and Lothians Racial Equality Council (ELREC)

1015hrs – 1030hrs – ‘Namina’s Story’, Mridul Wadhwa, Shakti Women’s Aid

1030hrs – 1045hrs – Islam and Marriage, Obaida Rahman, Islamic Scholar

1045hrs – 1100hrs – The Role of the Police, Inspector Helen Boyle, Lothian and Borders Police Diversity Unit

1100hrs – 1115hrs – Coffee

1115hrs – 1245hrs – World Café event on Arranged/Forced Marriage.

1245hrs – Feedback, Close and Lunch – Nina Giles, ELREC

The World Cafe

A key element of the day was to create a safe space for the women to share their opinions and experiences with service providers. We decided to follow the world café approach to facilitation to explore not only the barriers which ME women experience in accessing our services but also to allow the participants to think creatively about solutions. It was vital to ensure that our delegates had appropriate language support. The evidence gathered has been documented in this report under the following themes, which were the main topics of discussion:

Theme 1: How are marriages arranged/ what do you understand by Forced Marriage?

- An arranged marriage is organised with the consultation of the potential spouse and family. The male and female can meet together on their own, in order to get to know each other better. In a Forced Marriage there is no opportunity to say No or negotiate with the family.
- There are a number of reasons why Forced Marriage happens – minorities are fearful of losing their identity; people try to preserve their culture by getting their children to marry people from the same cultural background. Many also experience pressure from other family members to get their children married. Some use Forced Marriage as an immigration strategy, to bring over their relatives from abroad to the UK. There is also psychological pressure to have their children married from a certain age. There is not so much Forced Marriage of men but they also experience cultural and psychological pressure. In Islam men are allowed to marry non Muslim women, which allows them more freedom, but a Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim man unless he converts. In Africa Forced Marriage of young girls is very common, especially in rural areas.
- In 2 ways eg I have a daughter and I will arrange her marriage by either taking her back home to find a husband with her consent or she must marry whomever I want her to.
- There is a clear difference between forced and arranged marriages
- Christian perspective is that arranged marriages are done in agreement between parents. Arranged marriages are not exclusive to Muslim communities.
- Eg a friend was forced to get married after abuse from her parents, black magic involved. She was forced to marry abroad but did eventually get divorced. Black magic is very common in rural areas. Kids are often brainwashed and emotional blackmail used.

Lots of pressure is involved. Islam is often used as an excuse to permit Forced Marriages.

- Hindu perspective – I work as a counselor - when we lack support we often make decisions that are due to vulnerability eg it could be your faith or cultural practice. A mother could use emotional blackmail therefore your emotional strength decreases and therefore you relent to your family. There is a lot of community pressure too.
- When small communities leave their homeland and come here they feel enormous pressure. A lot of community pressure. Value based judgments, examples used to enforce forced marriages – sometimes freedom only permitted to ages 20-21 – after that you are made to feel like an old maid eg shelf life expiry when aged 25 and not married.
- 30 year old pressured into getting married as she is ‘getting on’. ‘Why are you not married?’ Classed as ‘expiry date’.
- Media portrayal is different to what is actually going on eg alot of my cousins had arranged marriages when they were young but they are happy.
- 21 year old getting worried as not married yet – family and community pressure. Sister almost 26 and experiencing unbelievable pressure. Age issue is really bad – starting to panic, subconsciously always at the back of mind.
- There are many communities in Britain that practice arranged marriages – marry within classes but not discussed and acknowledged.
- If there were a young person who was being told they had to marry someone who was ‘in every way suitable’ and the family pressure was ongoing would this be defined as forced? Majority answer ‘yes’. One lady present had this exact experience.
- Constant nagging, emotional blackmail, parents insisting they are not forcing marriage, however constant stress and pressure means you are more likely to then give in.
- Often the minute a girl or boy hits puberty the pressure is on. All immediate and extended family get involved, this enormous pressure often leads to girls going to university and behaving in an acute manner, going out and partying continuously. They often lose their values, as they know this may be the only time they can really let go and enjoy themselves before being forced into marriage. One girl had been in further education for the last 10 years purely to escape a forced marriage; she had no option to find her own suitor.
- Average person does not realise the difference between arranged and forced marriage due to media portrayal eg ‘honour based violence’.

- Forced marriage can be like an arranged marriage where one party doesn't agree.
- In Islam you can look at each other to see if you like each other in a family setting.
- In Islam you are allowed to investigate the other party. Parents will do the investigation. We put trust in our parents to ensure the other party is suitable.
- Where the groom or bride has no choice then it becomes a forced marriage.
- In present times children do not like to take risks like in the old days. Our children like to make their own decisions.
- There is an idea that there is choice however that is restricted when it becomes forced. Some girls are threatened with death, abduction, some are raped.
- Muslim girls must marry Muslim men. Men are permitted to marry non Muslims. If a woman marries out with then they are banished from Islam.
- Fear is in parents mind that their daughter will marry out with Islam, therefore the marriage will be forced.
- It may be forced if a female finds a suitor on her own out with the family's choice for them.
- Forced marriage involves lack of consultation.
- Finances, Religion and culture are all factors in arranged/ forced marriage. There is very often a background of getting rid of financial responsibilities by marrying your daughter off especially if eg you have lots of daughters.
- Marriages are arranged in heaven – there is no exact answer.
- Families use Islam to blackmail children.
- Islamic scholars don't always give the true picture of Islam, which is that Islam does not condone Forced Marriage.
- Free will is the difference between Arranged Marriage and Forced Marriage.
- Arranged Marriage is secure – a lot of women want one.
- Most Forced Marriages occur in Pakistan not the UK.
- Big issue of consent at a young age – some 16 year olds may not have full capacity to give consent to marry whereas some can.

Theme 2: How can we (voluntary and professional bodies) better support those who could be affected by forced marriage?

- Community leaders have a responsibility to speak out against this practice.
- People need to be educated about the after effects of forced marriage on the victim.

- The police should charge parents and it should be made a crime.
- Forced Marriage legislation should be implemented in Scotland too.
- Raise awareness.
- Contact schools to work sensitively with children from a young age – important for trust, security issues.
- Make ELREC (Edinburgh Lothian Race Equality Council)'s agencies' work better known.
- Target universities via notice boards, websites and email. Contact student support services eg Saheliya work with universities.
- 'Young Saheliya' to help young girls/ women.
- Some universities have a Muslim society.
- Police, Health Board and Council – partnership working.
- Shouldn't be seen as just one community's problem. Should be a rolling programme.
- We need to speak to the elders and target areas where there are communities. It should be the ethnic group professionals who do this as the elders would be suspicious of white Western professional staff and would perceive this as 'the bad West'.
- To enable Sharia counseling in the Mosque to teach and guide what your rights are. Engage an Imam.
- A greater understanding of education of Islam.
- Not to confuse the difference between religion and culture
- Target parents/ older people eg groups like MILAN and Nari Kallyan Shango.
- You need more volunteers from the community to pass on the message.
- Prevention is the key for professional and voluntary bodies – volunteers to keep a close eye on communities to prevent Forced Marriage from taking place.
- Doctors – GP surgeries need to be targeted. A routine enquiry could reveal a potential case of forced marriage eg through midwifery, community health, substance abuse, mental health services or family planning. This should be tackled under the Scottish Government 'Violence Against Women' strategy.
- Schoolteachers should also be trained to become aware of the warning signs eg long, unexplained holidays.
- Agencies should be made aware of the issues of emotional blackmail and brainwashing of children through the child protection guidelines.
- Language requirements should be taken into account when providing information.
- Consideration should be taken of the fear within some small communities of word getting back to the community when victims make contact with agencies such as Shakti or Saheliya.

- Duty of Care – must take concerns forward and act on them when they are disclosed eg schools, youth workers, social workers, NHS. Child Protection Guidelines must be closely followed.
- There was a general agreement that it would be a long process to change attitudes - sons and young boys should be targeted to improve outcomes for future generations.

Theme 3: How can attitudes change?

- Parents need to think about what they are doing – what is the purpose of having children and what as a parent do we want for our children. Parents need to think about their children's life and happiness.
- Very difficult as many communities have a male dominated culture.
- Men are the leaders of most families therefore in most of the families men decide therefore men need to be targeted.
- Find out who is the decision maker and focus on that person.
- Best person to pass on the message that forced marriage would be someone from the same community and culture who understands the issues.
- More use of film case studies like the one that Shakti played at this event.
- Different levels of education/ awareness.
- Equality issues to be addressed between genders.
- Role models for men who speak out about Forced Marriage being unacceptable.
- Mothers need to be targeted to change their attitudes.
- Female role models including female scholars need to be utilised to send out the message to communities.
- The concept of role models needs to be changed.
- There needs to be better support groups in communities for young people.
- Women need to be made aware of their rights.
- Women need to be empowered to make their own choices and decisions.

Organisations and Community Groups Represented

Around 50 people attended the event. This included around 40 BME women from the community from all different backgrounds.

In addition to this there were representatives from the following agencies –

Edinburgh and Lothian's Race Equality Council (ELREC)

Lothian and Borders Police

AMINA Muslim Women's Resource Centre

Scottish Court Service

City of Edinburgh Council

Child Protection Office

Lothian and Borders Police Lay Advisors

Shakti Women's Aid

Saheliya

Beyond the Veil

Blackhall Mosque

Dignity and Research Forum

Summary of Action Points

1. Professional and Voluntary Bodies to work with influential members of the community and faith groups to encourage them to speak out against the practice of Forced Marriage.
2. Professional and Voluntary Bodies to work sensitively with schools to raise awareness of Forced Marriage issues amongst children. Training should also be given to school teachers in how to become aware of warning signs/ early indicators of potential Forced Marriage situations eg long, unexplained holidays.
3. Raise profile of the work undertaken by minority ethnic support agencies to support girls/ young people who are victims or potential victims of Forced Marriage eg through targeting university and college notice boards, websites, email and youth groups.
4. Professional and Voluntary Bodies to ensure that they work with a wide and diverse range of different community and faith groups – not just stereotyping Forced Marriage to a particular culture or faith.
5. Target parents/ older persons groups to spread the message amongst community elders that Forced Marriage is unacceptable.
6. Increased focus on ‘prevention’ work in the field of Forced Marriage by professional and voluntary bodies –staff to be more aware of warning signs/ early indicators in communities of a Forced Marriage situation arising. Health services eg GP surgeries, midwifery services, community health, substance abuse, mental health services, family planning etc would be key opportunities for this.
7. Child Protection Committees to ensure that clear guidance is contained within the reviewed Child Protection Guidelines raising awareness of emotional abuse of children into Forced Marriage situations. Thereafter awareness raising work should take place to ensure that professional and voluntary bodies are fully aware of their duties and responsibilities under the guidelines to take forward concerns and act effectively upon them.
8. Professional and Voluntary Bodies to target Minority Ethnic Youth Groups of young males to deliver messages speaking out against the practice of Forced Marriage.

Communities and Individuals will –

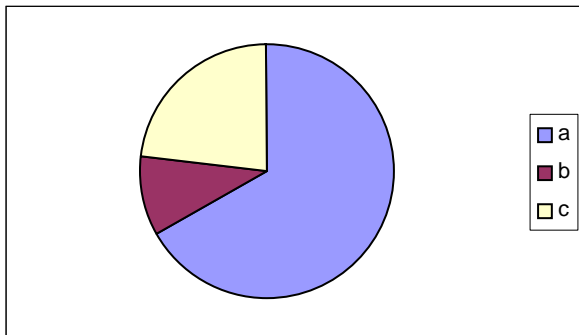
Take responsibility for spreading the message within their communities that Forced Marriage will not be tolerated and sign post victims to professional and voluntary bodies that can provide them with confidential support and advice. They will also develop a shared understanding of the definition of Forced Marriage.

Feedback from the Event

QUESTIONNAIRE 1 – Completed at the beginning of the event

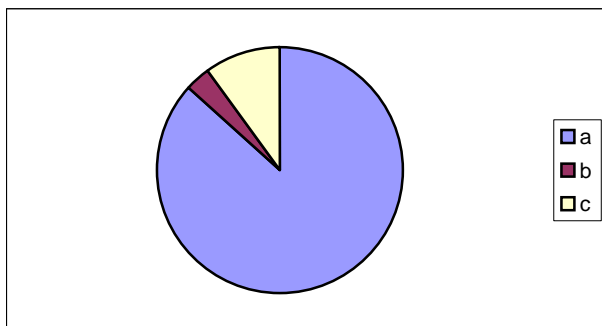
1. What do you understand by 'Forced Marriage'? (Please tick or describe)

- a) 'A marriage conducted without valid consent of one or both parties, where duress is a factor.' 67%
- b) Other – 'Being forced to marry someone you don't want to', 'where there is no choice/ freedom', 'not given the rights of choosing to marry a person of your own choice' 10%
- c) No answer 23%



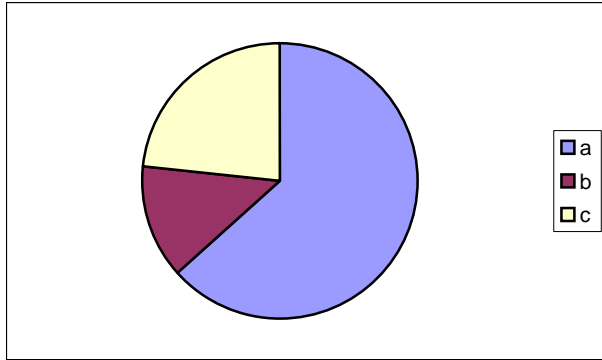
2. Do you think you have the opportunity to discuss this issue?

- a) Yes 87% b) No 3% c) Not sure 10%



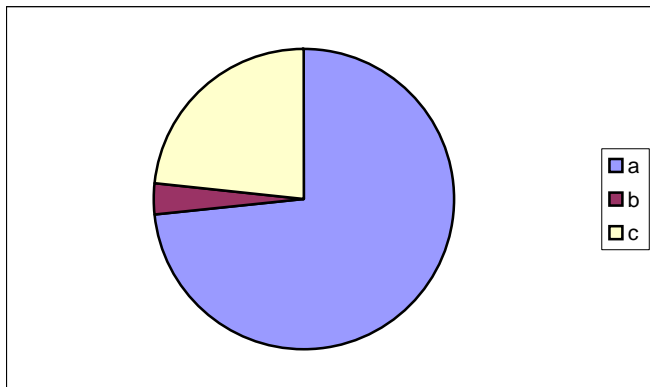
3. Do you know where you would get support with a Forced Marriage issue/ situation?

a) Yes 63% b) No 13% c) Not sure 24%



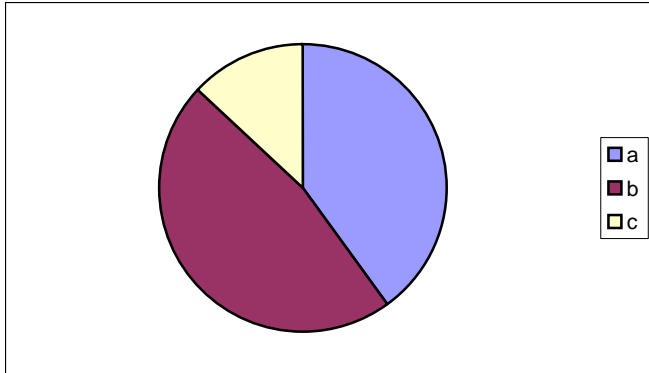
4. Would you feel confident about approaching agencies to get support with a Forced Marriage issue/ situation?

a) Yes 73% b) No 3% c) Not sure 24%



5. Do you know anyone who is or has been affected by Forced Marriage?

a) Yes 40% b) No 47% c) Not sure 13%



6. What is your age?

16-24 13% 25-34 27% 35-40 27% 41-55 30% 56-70 0% over 70 3%

7. What is your marital status?

Single 20% Married 60% Separated 10% Divorced 7% Widow 3%

8. What is your religion?

Sikh 10% Muslim 50% Hindu 7% Christian 20% Jewish
Bhuddist 3%

Taoist Other - respecer of all faiths, adhere to none, atheist, non-religious

9. What is your first language?

Punjabi 20% Urdu 7% Cantonese 3.5% Mandarin 3.5% Hindi 3%
English 40% Arabic 7% Danish 3% Bengali 7% Africaans 3%
French 3%

10. Do you look after another adult as a carer?

Yes 7% No 93%

11. Do you have a disability?

Yes 3% No 97%

12. How would you describe your ethnicity

White Scottish 10% White other 10% Chinese 7% Pakistani 30%
Indian 13% Black African 0 Other South Asian 7% Arab African
3% Mixed race 10% Bengali 7% Kenyan Asian 3%

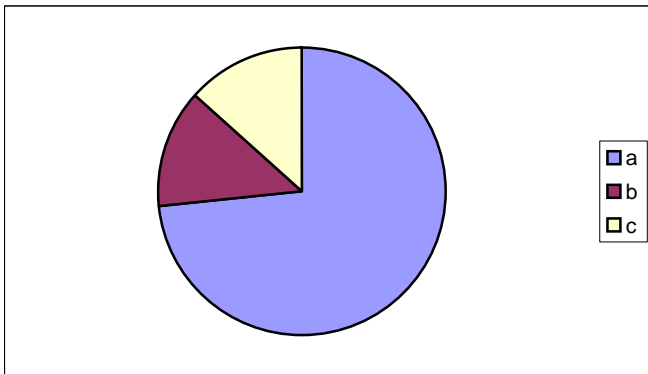
QUESTIONNAIRE 2 – Completed at the end of the event

1. What do you now understand by ‘Forced Marriage’? (Please tick or describe)

a) ‘A marriage conducted without valid consent of one or both parties, where duress is a factor.’ 73%

b) Other – ‘Where there is no choice – freedom’, ‘a marriage where one or both parties is under constant pressure to become involved in community’, ‘it could be emotional as well as verbal pressure’, duress takes many forms’, ‘lifetime pressure’, ‘where the choice of one or both parties has not been respected’ 13.5%

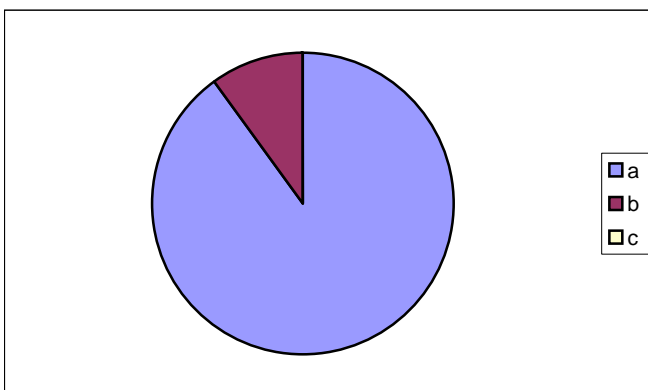
c) No answer 13.5%



2. Did your understanding change after the ‘Your marriage, Your rights’ event?

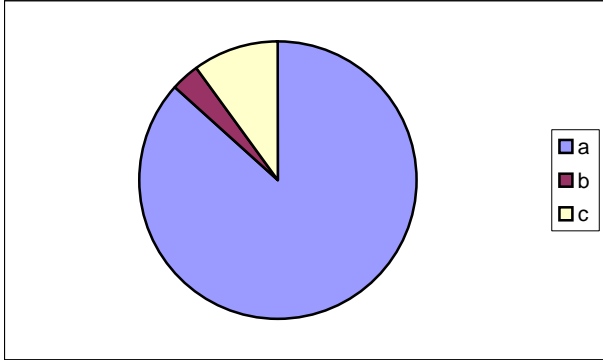
a) Yes I understand more 90%

b) No I understand the same 10%



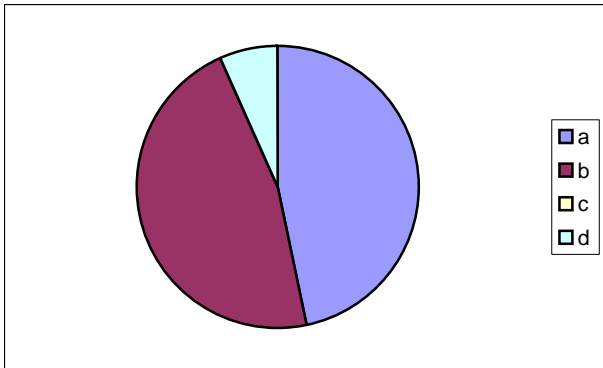
3. Did you think that you had the opportunity to discuss this issue today?

a) Yes 87% **b) No 3%** **c) Not sure 10%**



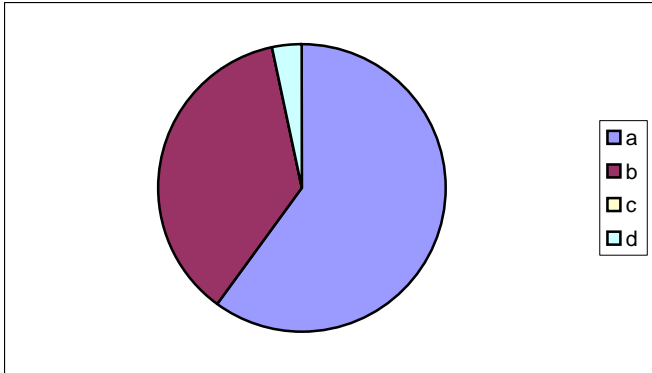
4. Do you know now where you could get support with a Forced Marriage issue/ situation?

a) Yes, I knew already 47% **b) Yes, I now know 47%** **c) No 0** **d) Not sure 6%**



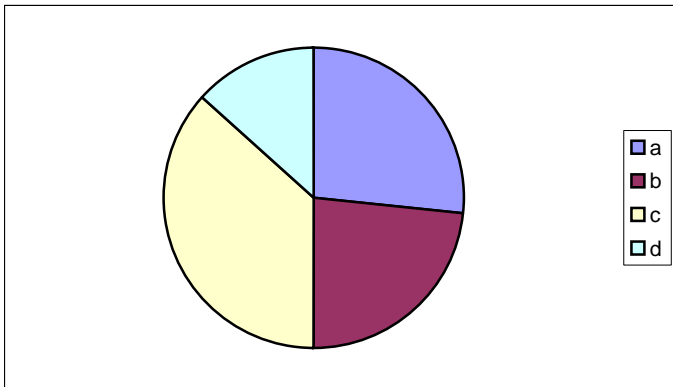
5. Would you now feel confident about approaching agencies to get support with a Forced Marriage issue/ situation?

a) Yes I already knew 60% **b) Yes, I know now 37%** **c) No 0** **d) Not sure 3%**



6. Do you know anyone who is or has been affected by Forced Marriage?

a) Yes, I already knew 27% b) Yes, I know now 23% c) No 37% d) Not sure 13%



Feedback and Contacts

If you have further feedback from the event or would like to contact us with a view to arranging another similar event please use the contact details below –

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If you would like a copy of this report in a different language or format please get in touch using the address above.