

# B.C. groups aim to track statistics on forced marriages

## Two-month project to identify suspected cases

BY TARA CARMAN, VANCOUVER SUN JULY 30, 2015



At the moment, there is no specific data involving forced marriages here in B.C.

**Photograph by:** Michael Harper, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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As federal legislation that criminalizes forced marriage is set to become law, B.C. groups are left questioning just how often such arrangements occur in this province and which communities are most affected.

At the moment, there is no data specific to B.C.

However, local immigrant services organization, MOSAIC, has teamed up with the Ending Violence Association of B.C. to find out.

Starting in September, MOSAIC settlement workers and a partner anti-violence organization will launch a two-month pilot project to help outreach workers and police identify and document suspected cases, with close to \$130,000 in funding from the federal Justice Department, said Chany Chea, a project manager with MOSAIC.

“The thing that’s difficult about forced marriage ... is that a lot of the signs are similar to domestic violence. There are certain things like, if it’s a younger person ... they could be taken overseas on

vacation and they might feel really nervous about that,” Chea said. “(They could be) missing big chunks of school for unknown reasons, things like that.”

Early indications are it may be a significant problem.

The group recently surveyed 52 service providers who are likely to have contact with vulnerable women, including anti-violence workers, community workers and police.

Asked whether they had ever assisted a client who was suspected or known to be participating in a forced marriage — defined as a marriage at least one party entered into without consent — 40 per cent reported encountering two to five cases in the last three years. Almost two-thirds of those respondents said they knew it was a forced marriage because the client told them so directly.

“That is quite a large number. We can’t really say how many cases are in B.C., but it gives you a sense that it does happen,” said Chea.

The federal government was tracking 600 cases of forced marriage across Canada between 2010 and 2012, according to internal emails obtained by The Sun from Citizenship and Immigration Canada under the Access to Information Act.

There were 219 cases identified in Ontario alone during the same time period, according to a 2013 report on forced marriage by the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario.

While the issue of forced marriage is typically associated with the South Asian community, and immigrants are the target of the federal legislation criminalizing the practice, it is by no means limited to those communities, Chea said. The Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints community in Bountiful is one example of a Canadian-born group that practices forced marriage.

“It’s a problem that expands across all cultures, but may be more prevalent in some,” Chea said.

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