



Research Finding: India Case Study

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Covid-19 and Covid-related restrictions appear to have had a less-significant impact on cases handled by the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) with India as the “focus country”. The decrease in cases is less significant than the decrease in total cases, and also the decrease in cases for other “focus countries”.¹

A significant change can be seen in the proportion of female victims compared to pre-pandemic years. This may suggest an unequal impact of Covid-19 and Covid-related restrictions on women and girls in 2020.

India frequently features as a “focus country” in statistics from the FMU. In this case study, we are interested in whether the 2020- statistics published by the FMU show any significant impacts on cases with India as a “focus country” during the Covid-19 pandemic.²

Background

According to the FMU, ‘a “focus country” is the country to which the risk of forced marriage relates. This could be the country where the forced marriage is due to take place, the country where it has taken place, and/or the country in which the spouse is currently residing’.³

The FMU provides help to citizens of any country inside the UK, and to British nationals overseas.⁴ That is, in cases where India is listed as a “focus country”, the case might involve a British national taken to India for a forced marriage; a British national being forced to marry an Indian national in the UK; and/or an Indian national being forced to marry someone in the UK.

Since 2017, the FMU has provided more detail on cases from the most frequent “focus

countries”; India has consistently appeared as one of these countries, with the third highest number of cases in 2020, (following Pakistan and Bangladesh)⁵. Cases, account for approximately 6% of the total on average each year between 2017 and 2020.⁶

Although we should be very wary about stereotyping those at risk of forced marriage⁷, it seems likely that most people at risk of a forced marriage involving India as a “focus country” are of Indian heritage. According to the 2011 census, there were 1,412,958 people of Indian ethnicity in England and Wales, making up 2.5% of the population⁸. India was one of the most-common non-UK countries of birth in 2011 (alongside Pakistan and Poland).⁹ The percentage of cases where India is a “focus country”, therefore, is larger than the percentage of people identifying as being of Indian ethnicity in the UK.



Number of Cases

	Number cases with India as the "focus country"	Total Number of Cases
2017	82	1196
2018	85	1507
2019	65	1355
2020	44	759

Table 3: Age Range of Forced Marriage Victims in India (2017 – 2020)¹⁰

In general, in 2020 the FMU handled 50% of the number of cases they handled in 2018, and 56% of the number in 2019.¹¹ In 2020, there were roughly two-thirds (68%) of the number of cases in 2019 with India as a focus country, and just over half the number of cases with India as a focus country in 2018 (52%).¹² The decline in cases with India as a focus country, then, was less substantial compared to the total average. However, it was a slightly greater decline compared to the 2018-2019 change.

The 2020 decline is in line with a trajectory from 2018: there were 20 fewer cases in 2019 than in 2018, and 21 fewer cases in 2020 than in 2019. Covid-19 and Covid-related restrictions do not seem to have had as-significant an impact on India than on the general average, and given the pre-pandemic trajectory, the decline we do see may have been due to non-Covid factors which were already impacting the number of forced marriage cases handled by the FMU with India as a "focus country".¹³

Sex of Victims

On average, 67.2% of cases with India as the focus country have involved female victims from 2017-2019. 2020 is a significant increase on that, though more in line with 2018. This may suggest that women were more at risk in 2020 than in the previous years.

In general, 79.5% of cases handled by the FMU pre-pandemic had female victims¹⁴, so India was something of an outlier before the pandemic. In 2020, the split was 80% female, 20% male.¹⁵ Cases with India as the focus country were closer to that, but still notably different.

	% Female	% Male	% Unknown
2017	64.6	35.4	-
2018	71	27	2
2019	66	34	-
2020	75	25	-

Table 2: Forced Marriage Victims by Sex (2017-2020)¹⁶

Indeed it is worth noting that, in general, how many male victims there are, year on year, in cases involving India as the focus country, because forced marriage is generally assumed mainly – perhaps only – to affect females.

Age of Victims

Age Range	2017	2018	2019	2020
15 & under	6 (7.3%)	9 (11%)	9 (14%)	<5
16-17	8 (9.8%)	<5	<5	<5
18-21	8 (9.8%)	13 (15%)	8 (12%)	8 (18%)
22-25	10 (12.2%)	9 (11%)	5 (8%)	11 (25%)
26-30	8 (9.8%)	13 (15%)	9 (14%)	5 (11%)
31-40	18 (22.0%)	18 (21%)	13 (20%)	7 (16%)
41 & over	8 (9.8%)	5 (6%)	5 (8%)	<5
Unknown	16 (19.5%)	14 (16%)	15 (23%)	6 (14%)

Table 3: Age Range of Forced Marriage Victims in India (2017 – 2020)¹⁷

A significant number of cases handled by the FMU with India as the focus country involve victims whose age is not known, which makes analysis of the data more difficult. It seems significant that there are very rarely any victims aged 16-17 – but then this might simply be because those victims ages are not recorded.

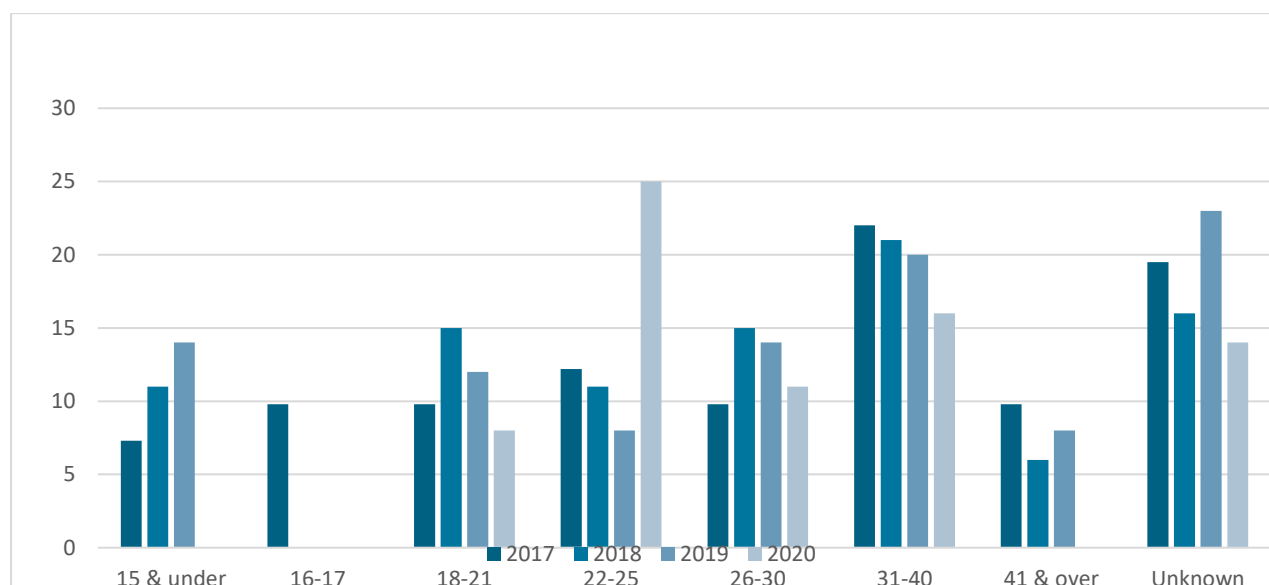


Figure 1: percentage of victims in each age range, 2017-2020.¹⁸

Pre-pandemic, the most populated age-category was 31-40, accounting for just over 20% of all cases. The second most-populated age category was 26-30 (almost 13%), and then 18-21 (just over 12%).

In 2020, it is notable that there were fewer than 5 cases recorded in both the 15-and-under age range, as well as the 16-17 age range. This suggests that hardly any forced marriages were attempted against school-age children where India was the focus-country in 2020. On the other hand, it may suggest that these marriages simply did not come to the attention of the FMU, perhaps because of school-closures (so concerned teachers were not making contact, and victims themselves may have found making contact harder).

Despite Covid-19 and related restrictions, and the general impact this had on cases handled by the FMU (including those with India as a focus country) the same number of people aged 18-21 were involved in cases handled by the FMU in 2020 as in 2019 (8 people).

It is also noteworthy that more than twice as many victims aged 22-25 were involved in

2020 than in 2019; and that almost half the number of victims were aged 26-30 and 31-40 in 2019 compared to 2020 where India was the focus country.

That fewer than five people over the age of 41 were involved in cases with India as a focus country handled by the FMU may not be a significant decrease on 2019 (where there were five).

The most notable difference in the 2020 data is the 25% of cases involved victims aged 22-25, previously one of the least-populated age-groups, though in real terms this is a similar number of people to 2017 and 2018, and perhaps it only shows that 2019 was something of an anomaly.

Some of these trends may be due to the impact of Covid-19 and Covid-related restrictions such as moving to home-working, but some may be the result of on-going trends regarding forced marriage involving India as a focus country. The decrease in “Unknown” ages may also be affecting the data.

Regions

Taking out the regions which have never had been linked to cases, London, the West Midlands, the East Midlands and the South East evidently see most cases, though as with age a lot is “unknown”.

There were significantly fewer cases (proportionately) in London in 2020 – though this may not be due so much to Covid-19 but to an on-going, pre-pandemic decline in cases associated with London. There was a very significant drop in cases in the East Midlands, and the reversal of a trajectory of decline in the West Midlands (though only by one case).

These changes do not seem to align with any specific Covid-19 restrictions: London underwent some tighter restrictions for longer than, for instance, the East (and so did some areas of the East Midlands), and cases went down: the West Midlands also experienced stricter restrictions for longer, and cases went up; restrictions were also more severe for longer in the North West, and there were no cases in 2020.

UK Region	2017	2018	2019	2020
London	29 (35.40%)	25 (29%)	15 (23%)	9 (20%)
West Midlands	14 (17.10%)	11 (13%)	6 (9%)	7 (16%)
North West	7 (8.50%)	<5	<5	<5
East	-	6 (7%)	<5	<5
South East	<5	5 (6%)	10 (15%)	5 (11%)
East Midlands	12 (14.60%)	5 (6%)	9 (14%)	<5
South West	<5	<5	<5	<5
Wales	-	-	-	-
North East	-	<5	<5	<5
Yorkshire & The Humber	<5	-	5 (8%)	<5
Scotland	<5	5 (6%)	<5	-
Northern Ireland	<5	<5	<5	-
Unknown	7 (8.50%)	19 (22%)	8 (12%)	11 (25%)

Table 4: Region of victims in FMU cases (2017 – 2020)¹⁹

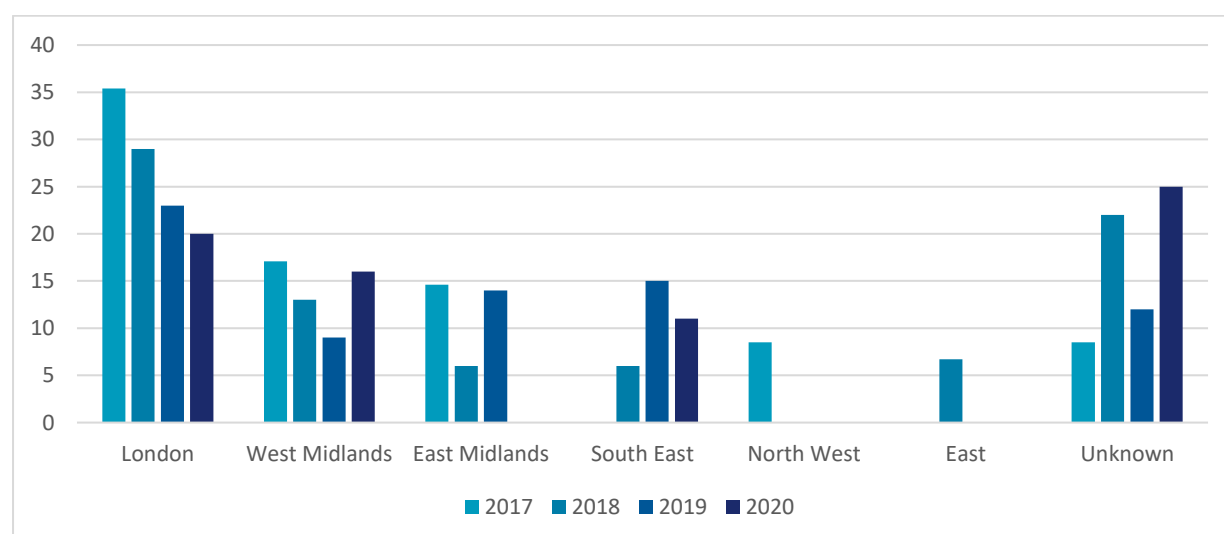


Figure 2: percentage of victims in each age range, 2017-2020.²⁰

Victim Status

“Victim status” refers to whether the victim was in the UK when they contacted the FMU, or overseas (i.e. in India).

	UK	Overseas	Unknown
2017	67 (81.7%)	14 (17.1%)	1 (1.2%)
2018	69 (81%)	15 (18%)	1 (1%)
2019	58 (89%)	7 (11%)	-
2020	36 (82%)	6 (14%)	2 (5%)

Table 5: Victim Status in cases where India was the “focus country” handled by FMU 2017-2020.²¹

Victim status has evidently fluctuated over the past four years, between 80 and 90%. The same percentage of people were in the UK when they first made contact with the FMU in 2020 as (roughly) 2017 and 2018. A similar number of people were already abroad in 2019 and in 2020 – half the number of people in 2017 and 2018.

Travel became more limited at the end of March 2020, when India suspended all domestic and international flights until August 31.²² In addition, from March 2020, UK citizens/residents were advised against “inessential” travel (though

travelling for a wedding may have counted as being “essential”).²³ After the first “lockdown”, the FCDO advice against international travel remained, and self-isolation rules were brought in for arrivals to the UK.²⁴ The main window for international travel to/from India, then, would have been from January to March 2020 and September to December 2020.

Evidently, some people took advantage of travel being possible (or somehow travelled when travel was not officially permitted), as 6 people were already abroad when they first made contact with the FMU in cases where India was the focus country. 6 people is fewer than in any year for which we have previous data, but it is still quite a few people in a year when travel was so difficult, and often impossible, between India and the UK. However, as this is almost the same number of in 2019, it is not clear whether we can see an impact of Covid-19 here, or whether this is due to pre-existing trends affecting forced marriage cases handled by the FMU with India as the focus country.

That 6 people were out of the country before they made first contact with the FMU (or someone did on their behalf) may suggest either that they did not know the real purpose of their travel until they were already abroad, or that they had difficulty contacting the FMU, perhaps because of Covid-related restrictions.

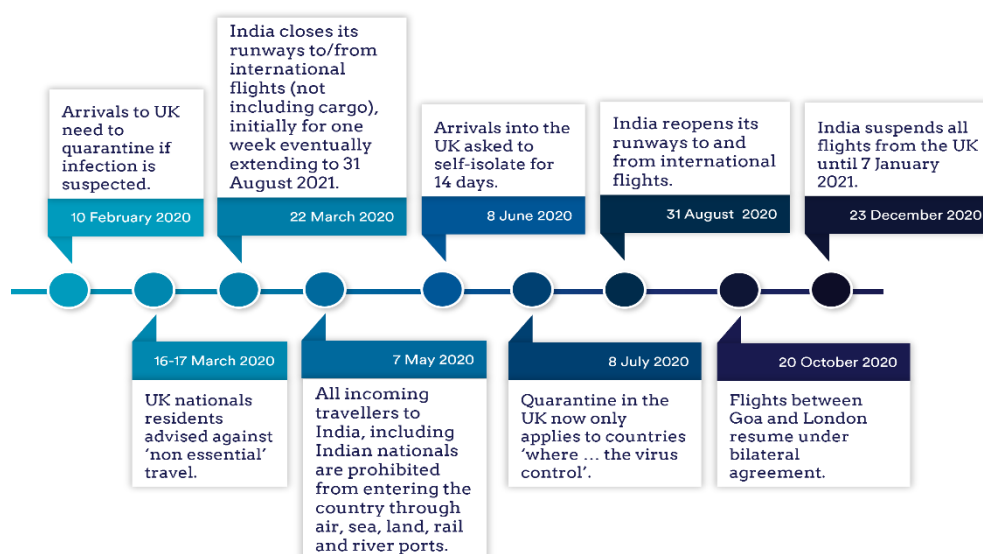


Figure 3: Timeline of relevant events



Further Work

We continue to monitor the impact of Covid-19 and Covid-related restrictions on forced marriage in the UK. This case study is part of a series on all the “focus countries” for which the FMU has provided detailed data in 2020 – Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Somalia, and the UK. Once we have prepared all these case studies, we will be able to consider broader findings and recommendations

References

¹ Somalia:

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/beacons-of-excellence/rights-lab/resources/reports-and-briefings/2021/november/somalia-case-study.pdf>.

Bangladesh:

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Pakistan:

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/beacons-of-excellence/rights-lab/resources/reports-and-briefings/2021/october/briefing-pakistan-case-study.pdf>

² This is an update from the ESRC-funded project (ES/N015270/1) investigating the impact of Covid-19 and Covid-related decision-making on forced marriage in the UK.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2020/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2020>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/forced-marriage>.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2020/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2020>

⁶ See data available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/forced-marriage-unit-statistics>.

⁷ For more on this see, for example, Sundari Anitha and Aisha Gill, ‘Coercion, Consent and the Forced Marriage Debate in the UK’, *Feminist Legal Studies* 17(2) (2004), 165-184 and ‘A Moral Panic? The Problematisation of Forced Marriage in British Newspapers’, *Violence Against Women* 21(9) (2015), 1123-1144.

⁸ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/summaries/indian-ethnic-group#population>

⁹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/articles/internationalmigrantsinenglandandwales/2012-12-11>

¹⁰ See data available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/forced-marriage-unit-statistics>.

¹¹ See <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/beacons-of-excellence/rights-lab/resources/reports-and-briefings/2021/july/impact-of-covid-19-on-calls-to-the-forced-marriage-unit.pdf>.

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2020/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2020>

¹³ It is worth noting that this decline in cases handled does not necessarily mean a decline in actual cases. We have no baseline prevalence data to work with, only data of calls made to the FMU. Cases they handle may be declining because forced marriage itself is becoming less common, or because potential victims are finding it harder (even before the pandemic) to contact the FMU.

¹⁴ See <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/beacons-of-excellence/rights-lab/resources/reports-and-briefings/2021/july/impact-of-covid-19-on-calls-to-the-forced-marriage-unit.pdf>.

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2020/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2020>.

¹⁶ See data available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/forced-marriage-unit-statistics>.

¹⁷ See data available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/forced-marriage-unit-statistics>.

¹⁸ See data available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/forced-marriage-unit-statistics>.

¹⁹ See data available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/forced-marriage-unit-statistics>.

²⁰ See data available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/forced-marriage-unit-statistics>.

²¹ See data available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/forced-marriage-unit-statistics>.

²² <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1606637>;
<https://travelbans.org/asia/india/>.

²³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51917562>;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-on-coronavirus-16-march-2020>;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/travel-advice-foreign-secretary-statement-17-march-2020>;

²⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-announces-new-public-health-measures-for-all-uk-arrivals>;
<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-at-the-coronavirus-press-conference-3-june-2020>;
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