

## Summary and Conclusions

The focal point of this research paper is the question: *What place do forced marriages occupy in the process of choosing a spouse among Turks, Moroccans and Hindustani in the Netherlands?* This research paper focuses on a comparison between the three groups named.

### The following research questions are posed:

1. What views are held with respect to marriage, the importance of marriage and how it is brought about (especially the place given to freedom of choice, on the one hand, and coercion, on the other, with respect who one is to marry)
2. What strategies do marriage partners use?
3. Within what societal context does the phenomenon of marriage fit?
4. How often does the process of choosing a partner go against the will of the partners?
5. What views do the groups involved have of the role of the government with respect to forced marriages?

Through interviews with young people, parents, key figures and social scientists, combined with an analysis of websites and literature, this research was conducted over the course of two months. This means that the research cannot provide a representative picture of numbers and trends. In this research paper, we primarily focus on describing the process of choosing a marriage partner and the place that forced marriages occupy within this process. By forced marriage we mean: *a marriage in which the marriage partners, or one of them, have/has no say in the matter and does not consent to the marriage.*

Based on our research, we have concluded that forced marriages arise in all three subject groups. The coercion involved is sometimes expressed in physical force (of different forms). But usually many more subtle forms of coercion and pressure are involved. The decline in immigration for the purpose of marriage, the fact that Turkish, Moroccan and Hindustani Dutch young people grow up in an environment in which autonomy is important, and the increasing emphasis placed on social autonomy in Moroccan families makes us think that the number of forced marriages is decreasing and that the phenomenon of forced marriage is increasingly less valued among both young people and parents.

It is not the case that ‘the’ Moroccan, Turkish or Hindustani ‘culture’ automatically leads to forced marriage. It is also not true that in ‘the’ Dutch ‘culture’ every marriage is based purely on free choice. The choices that people make within the process of choosing a partner come about under the influence of a range of personal, economic, social, political, cultural and demographic factors such as transnational networks, a preference for endogamy and ideals such as family loyalty and the institution of marriage. In our view, it can be justifiably concluded that forced marriage is a phenomenon that is slowly but surely declining among the three groups researched. Still, the pressure to marry (with a specific candidate) is sometimes experienced as enormous pressure by young people. Their perception of this pressure is in part shaped by a lack of communication with the parents and is therefore not always justified.

### Views with respect to marriage.

A significant part of the attention in this study was focused on the first question: what views do people have with respect to marriage, the importance of marriage and how it is brought about.

For all three groups researched – Turks, Moroccans and Hindustani – we can conclude that among young people increasing emphasis is placed on autonomy and freedom

of choice. This conclusion is confirmed because it is also found in other areas, such as among girls that choose to wear a headscarf. That is not to say that young people in practice give no consideration to their social environment. Choosing a partner, even when the norm is that this must be a free choice based on romantic feelings, is always a process in which social, economic and cultural factors play a large role.

The fact that young people take the wishes of their parents into consideration has to do with feelings of loyalty, appreciating the importance of having the family's support, respect for one's parents, the views of one's parents concerning a good future for their children and the role that a marriage plays in this. The outcome of all of these factors, in the end, lies somewhere between free choice and coercion. We see the same in parents. Gradually they are realising that they cannot ignore their son's or daughter's own choice of a partner. They also see in the world around them that forced marriages can go wrong. The practices of native Dutch people are not highly valued by Turkish, Moroccan and Hindustani Dutch people. Although the ideals of romantic love and freedom of choice are appreciated, some influence from the family, especially from the parents, is considered to be necessary. There are also young people that see any interference as a form of coercion.

A marriage in which one of the partners really does not want to marry the proposed candidate is rejected. The idea that a marriage can help to solve problems (such as 'overly free' behaviour on the part of a daughter or criminality on the part of a son) is still sometimes believed, but also ridiculed and rejected. The fact that parents now reject using strong coercion is the result of their experiences with older sons and daughters. These older children have often been married off and the impression that many people have is that such marriages quickly lead to divorce. For many parents this is reason enough to let their younger children choose their own partner.

Marriages and the choice of a marriage partner are closely tied to preserving the ethnic group. The practices of native Dutch people are sometimes seen as a threat to the existence of the ethnic minority group. Immigration for the purpose of marriage can be seen as a direct expression of preserving continuity with the past and with one's own family in the country of origin. These feelings of commitment, loyalty and identity are deeply felt by parents. It is therefore remarkable that the thinking of parents on the choosing of a partner is nonetheless gradually developing in the same direction as their children's. The parents and the group as a whole have thus experienced a turnaround in a relatively short time – within one generation.

### **Strategies**

The second question of this paper pertains to strategies that people use. The desire to preserve one's own ethnic group and cultural preferences such as endogamy still do not provide a sufficient explanation for the occurrence of arranged marriages, forced marriages and any excesses attached to them. Because the freedom that people have in this area is in part determined by the role played by their immediate family and the wider community, we will discuss this research question in conjunction with question three, concerning the context of choosing a partner.

It is remarkable that, in the case of all groups, we see that peers are playing an increasingly important role. Not only cousins, but also friends play an active role in influencing a young person's choice of a partner. People are introduced to one another and linked together based on the important consideration of whether people think along the same lines in the area of religion (practising or non-practising), plans for the future and views about how children should be raised. At a later stage, the parents are brought into the picture. Such a situation is in fact virtually an inversion of the process of arranged mar-

riages. While in the most strict forms of forced marriage the parents determine the process and sometimes do not even ask for their children's consent, now it is increasingly the children who determine the process and ask the parents for their consent. Here, too, we see that parents are undergoing a big change; they are relinquishing a part of their power with respect to choosing a partner for their children, which in practice gives young people greater freedom.

This does not take away the fact that young people often feel great pressure to marry and to marry a candidate that their parents propose. Education is a legitimate reason for postponing a marriage or even to postpone the entire process of choosing a partner. But after the education has been completed, the pressure increases. This is particularly true for women. If a woman is unable to continue her education, then the pressure begins to increase sooner. This pressure is usually not coupled with physical coercion. The pressure is usually of a psychological nature. We also see that, from a very young age, women are told that they will have to marry later on. This can happen when a young person asks parents to look for a partner. It also occurs when young people get the feeling that the time for them to marry has arrived. Although the views with respect to role patterns are changing, particularly among girls, women in all three groups researched remain the centre of attention in questions surrounding honour and shame, and they often also form the core of demarcating and maintaining ethnic boundaries. As a result, they remain vulnerable when the pressure becomes intense and they also have less freedom to take their own initiatives than men do.

Among Turks and Moroccans, the transnational network plays a role. This can involve family obligations and feelings of loyalty, making it very difficult for both parents and their children to escape the pressure. The parents can also serve as a bastion between their children and the family. But this does not always happen, and there are instances in which girls sometimes let themselves be 'pushed' into a marriage when on holiday in the country of origin. Then, when they return home, they sometimes regret it. In such a situation, they find it very difficult, if not impossible, to say 'no' later on.

This doesn't mean that all imported marriages are forced marriages. Nor does it mean that family members only exert pressure to marry. Occasionally family members step in to mediate between parents and children and sometimes a priest, pandit or imam is asked to mediate. This means that there must be communication and room for negotiation. This proves to be problematic for the three groups researched, because there is little communication or negotiation about choosing a partner. This seems to conflict with the pressure that is exerted by parents and family members who do initiate discussions concerning the choice of a partner. The lack of both communication and room for negotiation identified is primarily discerned by young people and much less by the parents.

### **Process of forcing a marriage partner**

The fourth research question concerns the process of forcing a marriage onto someone. Forced marriages occur among the three groups researched, but no recent figures are available. Marriages that are against the express wish of one of the two partners involved seem to be a marginal and disappearing phenomenon. Marriages in which intense pressure is exercised on a partner involved occur more often. A problem in this case is that the intended partners do not always make it clear that a marriage candidate or even the manner in which the partner is chosen is absolutely against their will. They let themselves be swept through the process or simply leave home. The latter does not always occur with the goal of breaking contact with the parents; on the contrary, most of the children that leave home prefer to return. But it does make clear that the aforementioned perception of young people – i.e. that there is little communication concerning the marriage

– makes it difficult for them to say no. They also find it difficult to estimate how much freedom they have to say no. Sometimes they learn later on that they had much greater freedom to do so than they thought they had at the time.

From the conclusions drawn in Chapters 3 and 4, we see that five situations continually return in the case of Turks and Moroccans with respect to forced marriages or marriages that come about under intense psychological pressure:

1. When the woman or man does not function well and, in the eyes of the parents, displays undesirable behaviour;
2. When there is a marriage candidate that the parents do not approve of;
3. When there is pressure to immigrate from the country of origin;
4. When there is a marriage with a blood relative;
5. A combination of the previous factors. With a combination of factors, the risk of a forced marriage seems greater; nonetheless, it remains true that such situations or combinations thereof do not automatically lead to forced marriages.

For Hindustani this is less clear; perhaps situation 1 and 2 can play a role. This report can leave the impression that, among Hindustani, there are fewer problems with respect to forced marriages. But we are not confident enough to give a final explanation of this since, because of the lack of secondary sources as literature on researches, the study among Hindustani was much more explorative in character. The respondents themselves pointed to problems caused by the closed nature of the group and the difficulty in discussing problems openly as a result. This problem seems to be greater among Hindustani than it is among Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands. All of this means that we must be very careful about establishing a relationship between forced marriages and the high percentage of suicides among Hindustani girls. It should be clear from the study of Salverda (2004) that, in the case of suicide, it involves an interplay of factors and that it is not clear exactly what the relationship is with forced marriages.

Although parents are increasingly accepting the fact that young people are taking the initiative to ask to choose for themselves, the views of the parents do not run parallel to those of these same young people. What young people perceive as force (which can sometimes be any interference by the parents), is not always recognised and acknowledged by the parents as such. What they are focused on, in their own eyes, is the happiness of their children. Though we have found extreme cases from the literature and via respondents, most of them pertained to the grey area between force and freedom of choice. The conflicts arising around the choice of a marriage partner come about in part because parents and young people have different definitions of marriage, happiness and family ties, and in some cases they try to lay these definitions on one another. The lack of communication in some families is also very important here. It makes negotiations about the process and about the different definitions that people use more difficult. It also makes it more difficult for young people to estimate the freedom that they have.

Forced marriage therefore seems to be a disappearing phenomenon. The tensions that arise around the subject of choosing a partner seem to pertain more to the fact that the groups concerned are undergoing great changes, as well as the fact that these changes do not run parallel for young people and parents respectively. These great changes are causing the problems and that's why there is a need for questions and services where young people can go. On this basis (and in view of the previously mentioned developments, such as a decline in immigration for the purpose of marriage), we think it is justified to conclude that forced marriages are a phenomenon that over time will decline among Dutch citizens from Turkish, Moroccan and Hindustani groups.

### **Forced marriages and the role of the government**

The conclusion that forced marriages are declining does not mean, for respondents, that nothing needs to be done about them. The groups involved have a range of ideas on possible ways the government could intervene. People recognise the problems surrounding the concept of force and therefore question the use of a legal approach to combat it. Most people think that education is the best way to combat the problem by making parents and children aware of it. Many also argue for collaboration with the social services, schools and the respective communities' own (religious) organisations. The importance that both parents and young people attach to good education for boys and girls and the changing views among girls with respect to gender roles seem to suggest that girls, in any case, think that their achievements in this area also contribute to the honour and status of the ethnic group and its preservation. Success in education is therefore supplanting the emphasis placed on a girl's virginity. This is a point that could be used, suggest the respondents.

Most would prefer to see initiatives that come from and that are focused on their own ethnic group. And they would like these initiatives to be supported by the government and assistance organisations. Turkish and Moroccan organisations seem to be further along in the development of initiatives for girls and women than are Hindustani organisations. In the latter group, according to respondents, people for a long time thought that problems of this nature did not exist among ethnic Indians. This notwithstanding, the communities' own organisations seem to be more suited for handling these types of matters. These organisations know the families and can determine in any given situation whether or not force is being used. Religious organisations, imams and pandits can indeed bring their religious authority to bear. Little if anything is said about possible obstacles existing in the collaboration between (religious) organisations and government or assistance organisations.

It is noteworthy that people of Hindustani descent, particularly, react very strongly to this subject and to possible plans of the government. They do not want to be associated with the problem of ethnic minorities and thus be identified with Turks and Moroccans. This shows that the manner in which the integration debate has been conducted, the murder of Van Gogh and the events subsequent to it can have their own impact on how the government's plans are received. Also, the term *victim* is not appreciated among Hindustani people, but also not by the other two groups; people do not want to be labelled as victims.

Almost everyone, even the supporters of combating forced marriages through legal means, warn against the view that a law will be sufficient on its own. A law can, according to some, have an important symbolic effect and serve as a basis to fall back on, but legislation will not solve any problems. The previously mentioned loyalty to family in the country of origin, the views concerning marriage and the interests of people do not suddenly disappear as a result of laws being passed. Assistance, information and training geared to making young people self-assured and the improvement of the communication between parents and children will continue to be necessary.

### **In conclusion: forced marriages and integration**

In the debate on social integration, the manner in which partners are chosen is seen as an indicator of this integration. Force and freedom of choice are juxtaposed. Studies have shown that force and freedom of choice in marriage actually represent the extremities of a continuum with a large grey area in between. Arranged marriages can be placed in this grey area.

In our research, parents seem to place great value on family relations and they see the question of whether or not the families of potential partners suit one another as being vitally important. In other words: they focus on the importance of familial relations and mutual support. This concerns more than the situation in the Netherlands alone and can involve the family living in Turkey and Morocco, respectively. The loyalties to, identification with, and commitment to the family there and the mutual obligations that ensue from this commitment mean that these can weigh more heavily than other aspects. In addition, a marriage is still seen as a way in which to solve problems. The woman then becomes the responsibility of her husband. And for the husband, it is the principal time at which he demonstrates his sense of responsibility. Another view is the one concerning the happiness of the children – parents are viewed as the ones that know what is best for their children.

With respect to children, there are two main views that can clash. On the one side there is the ideal of freedom of choice (children determine for themselves as to what will make them happy and what is best for them). On the other hand, they feel a sense of loyalty to their parents. Sometimes there is also the view that the parents are only looking after their best interests. Based on the first view, they could marry whom they choose, but loyalty to their parents means that they will take their parents' views into consideration and usually ask for their parents' consent. They would not usually present a candidate to their parents that they think would likely be rejected by them.

Although parents are increasingly shifting their position and favouring the romantic ideal and although young people have grown up with this ideal, there is still a gap between the generations in this respect. The idea that this is due to a lack of social integration or even to unsuccessful integration into Dutch society does not do justice to the great turnaround that parents in particular have made and ignores the fact that loyalty to the family and identification with one's own ethnic group cannot simply be ignored. The speed at which these changes are taking place differs for the two generations. As a result, parents and children are making different choices. In other words, parents and young people are changing, but not in the same manner and at the same speed, which means they see and interpret the world differently and therefore can act differently. This causes problems with respect to the choice of a marriage partner within and outside the group itself. It also explains why parents do not always recognise and acknowledge the pressure that they put on their children as coercion or force. At the same time, it is also easy to see why young people sometimes consider any interference by their parents as a form of coercion. The problem of 'forced marriages', for these groups, is therefore not so much the result of a lack of integration or of unsuccessful integration. It is rather the result of a process of strong integration that the two generations are experiencing at different speeds.