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Drawing on forced marriage

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ABSTRACT

Forced marriage is illegal in the United Kingdom and civil legal remedies have been created to protect victim-survivors. However, legal responses have to go hand in hand with education to prevent and end this harmful practice. Comics are a creative educational tool that is accessible, engaging and inclusive, reaching diverse audiences. Comics tell nuanced and sensitive stories about complex experiences, challenging readers to identify, understand and confront injustice, and to act for a better world. Therefore, comics are an effective way to teach teenagers about forced marriage and to support their development as allies to those at risk or already experiencing it.

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KEYWORDS Forced marriage; comics; secondary school education

Introduction

Forced marriages occur when one or both spouses do not or cannot (legally) consent, or have been pressured to “consent”.¹ In 2022, around 300 people asked the United Kingdom (UK) Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) for advice.² In addition to criminalising forced marriage³ and creating civil legal remedies,⁴ the Government,⁵ anti-forced

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¹Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and Home Office, “Forced Marriage” (7 March 2023) <www.gov.uk/guidance/forced-marriage#:~:text=A%20forced%20marriage%20is%20where,is%20illegal%20in%20the%20UK> accessed 1 August 2023.

²Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and Home Office, “Forced Marriage Unit Statistics 2022” (20 June 2023) <www.gov.uk/government/statistics/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2022/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2022> accessed 2 August 2023.

³Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, s 121–121; Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015, s 16.

⁴Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007; Forced Marriage etc. (Protection and Jurisdiction) (Scotland) Act 2011.

⁵Home Office, “Forced Marriage Resource Pack” <www.gov.uk/government/publications/forced-marriage-resource-pack/forced-marriage-resource-pack> accessed 1 August 2023.

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marriage organisations,⁶ researchers and affected communities⁷ highlighted the importance of education to prevent and end forced marriage.

Responding to the call for forced marriage education, our project aimed to demonstrate that comics are an effective tool to educate young people about the practice and to equip them to raise awareness and act as allies to those at risk or already experiencing it.

We developed a comic that tells seven stories about different types, causes and consequences of forced marriage, focusing on possibilities for resistance and intervention.⁸ The stories are grounded in existing research and the expertise of our project team.⁹ Hannah Baumeister researches forced marriage, its causes, consequences, and ways of addressing it in domestic and international law and through art.¹⁰ Emma Brown is a comic artist who utilises art to disseminate information and make research, for example on gender issues, more accessible.¹¹ Alex Carabine's work sits within the discipline of English Literature. She has published short stories and written on comics in the past.¹² Helen McCabe is a leading researcher concerned with the meaning and experience of forced marriage (and its relationship to modern slavery), understanding its causes and consequences, and developing more-effective interventions.¹³ Catherine Kirk works as a Relationships and Sex Education consultant for Nottingham City Council.¹⁴ Karma Nirvana and its Survivor Ambassadors¹⁵ as well as Savera UK and Savera UK Youth¹⁶ are leading non-governmental organisations that support those affected by honour-based abuse, including forced marriage, and work to end it, among other things through education. Childwall Sports and Science Academy¹⁷ and Nottingham Girls' Academy¹⁸ are two secondary schools in England that actively engage staff and students in social justice work as a way to promote personal and professional development. Project partners echoed existing research on comic-based pedagogy and forced marriage, spotlighting issues and questions that had to be tackled by the comic in a realistic, sensitive, nuanced, age-appropriate, engaging and empowering way.

⁶Freedom Charity, "Forced Marriage" <<https://freedomcharity.org.uk/forced-marriage/>> accessed 1 August 2023; Karma Nirvana, "Report Release: Women and Equalities Committee Report on Honour Based Abuse" (19 July 2023) <<https://karmanirvana.org.uk/news-item/report-release/>> accessed 1 August 2023; Savera UK, "About Us" <www.saverauk.co.uk/what-we-do/about-savera-uk/> accessed 1 August 2023.

⁷Geetanjali Gangoli, Amina Razak and Melanie McCarry, "Forced Marriage and Domestic Violence among South Asian Communities in North East England" (2006) <https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/porta/188679401/Final_report.pdf> accessed 1 August 2023.

⁸Hannah Baumeister and others, "I Choose: Let's Talk about Forced Marriage" (2023) <<https://drawingonblog.files.wordpress.com/2023/12/comic-wp-61223-1.pdf>> accessed 15 December 2023.

⁹Drawing on Forced Marriage, "Meet the Team" <<https://drawingon.blog/meet-the-team/>> accessed 13 March 2023.

¹⁰Liverpool John Moores University, "Dr Hannah Baumeister" <www.ljmu.ac.uk/about-us/staff-profiles/faculty-of-business-and-law/school-of-law/hannah-baumeister> accessed 13 March 2023.

¹¹Touch the Sun, "Uniting People Through Research, Art and Story Sharing" <<https://touchthesundesigns.com/>> accessed 3 August 2023.

¹²LinkedIn, "Alex Carabine" <<https://uk.linkedin.com/in/alex-carabine-b3b9a31bb>> accessed 3 August 2023.

¹³University of Nottingham, "Helen McCabe" <www.nottingham.ac.uk/politics/people/helen.mccabe> accessed 3 August 2023.

¹⁴The RSHE Service, "About" <www.rsheservice.co.uk/about> accessed 3 August 2023.

¹⁵Karma Nirvana, "About" <<https://karmanirvana.org.uk/about/>> accessed 3 August 2023.

¹⁶Savera UK, "About Us" (n 6).

¹⁷Childwall Sports and Science Academy <www.childwallssa.org/> accessed 3 August 2023.

¹⁸Nottingham Girls' Academy <www.nottinghamgirlsacademy.org/> accessed 3 August 2023.

Project partners also contributed to the development of lesson plans for two trial sessions with students aged 12 to 14 in two secondary schools in England. Findings from questionnaires as well as observations of and discussions with students who participated in the trial sessions demonstrate that the comic is an effective tool to educate young people about forced marriage and to encourage them to raise awareness and become allies to those at risk or already experiencing it.

This article first summarises existing research on forced marriage, its forms, causes, consequences and legal responses before outlining the educational potential of comics. Against this backdrop, the article describes our comic and explains how we utilised it in two trial sessions, offering an analysis and discussion of our findings. We conclude that our comic is an effective tool to help teenagers identify, understand and confront forced marriage.

Forced marriage

Approximately 300 people asked the FMU for advice on forced marriage in 2022. Around 30% of cases involved children, and around 70% involved female victim-survivors. The highest number of cases related to Pakistan and Bangladesh.¹⁹ Despite this prevalence, forced marriage affects people of different age groups, genders and backgrounds but not every member of any community experiences forced marriage and all major religions are against the practice.²⁰

Often, people are pressured to get married by multiple male and female perpetrators who are family or community members and/or friends.²¹

While forced marriage is not someone's culture, culture can be used to justify abuse. Perpetrators can feel obliged or pressured to comply with what is seen as tradition, or act out of concern for family reputation and honour. Forced marriages are also driven by diasporic experiences, financial considerations, social debt, considerations related to health and safety or caring needs, a desire to ensure what is considered to be a better future for family members, the aim to maintain or cement family ties, gender inequality, social control of what is viewed as deviant behaviour, disapproval of pre-marital or mixed romantic and/or sexual relationships, or censure of LGBTQIA+ identities.²²

While perpetrators can use physical, sexual and/or financial abuse to force a person into a marriage, most victim-survivors experience psychological and/or emotional pressure to get married.²³

¹⁹Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and Home Office (n 2).

²⁰Khatidja Chantler, Geetanjali Gangoli and Marianne Hester, "Forced Marriage in the UK: Religious, Cultural, Economic or State Violence?" (2009) 29 *Critical Social Policy* 587; Khatidja Chantler, "Forced Marriage" in Parveen Ali and Michaela M Rogers (eds), *Gender-Based Violence: A Comprehensive Guide* (Springer 2023); University of Bristol, "Pioneering Research Exposing Scale and Danger of Forced Marriages Calls for Urgent Reform to Protect Victims" (18 May 2023) <www.bristol.ac.uk/news/2023/may/forced-marriage-research.html> accessed 3 August 2023.

²¹Gangoli, Razak and McCarry (n 7); Aisha K Gill and Heather Harvey, "Examining the Impact of Gender on Young People's Views of Forced Marriage in Britain" (2017) 12 *Feminist Criminology* 72.

²²Antislavery Usable Past, "Laila" <www.antislavery.ac.uk/items/show/1935> accessed 13 March 2024; Sundari Anitha and Aisha Gill, "Coercion, Consent and the Forced Marriage Debate in the UK" (2009) 17 *Feminist Legal Studies* 165; Helen McCabe, Wendy Stickle and Hannah Baumeister, "Forced Marriage and Modern Slavery: Analysing Marriage as a 'Choiceless Choice'" (2022) 7 *Journal of Modern Slavery* 33; Chantler (n 20).

²³Gangoli, Razak and McCarry (n 7); Chantler (n 20).

While it is clear that duress invalidates consent,²⁴ the drivers of forced marriage highlight that the absence of overt pressure does not necessarily enable free choice as to whether, whom and when to marry.²⁵ “[C]onsent and coercion in relation to marriage [form] two ends of a continuum, between which lie degrees of socio-cultural expectation, control, persuasion, pressure, threat and force”.²⁶

The bounded nature of consent indicates a slippage between forced and arranged marriages. While a marriage is forced when one or both parties do not or cannot (legally) consent or are pressured to “consent” to marriage, both parties to an arranged marriage agree to have their marriage arranged, to their future spouse and the wedding arrangements. However, due to the continuum of consent and children’s socialisation into the inevitability of heteronormative marriage, the distinction between the two is not always clear cut.²⁷

A limited set of choices and/or pressure does not only compromise consent to enter into a marriage. It also binds decisions to leave.²⁸ Consequently, people might have no option but to stay in often unhealthy, abusive or even slavery-like relationships they did not want to be in in the first place.²⁹

Forced marriage is illegal in the UK. The crime covers situations where violence, threats or any other form of coercion is used to cause one or both spouses to enter into a marriage without their free and full consent; where one or both spouses lack capacity to consent; and where one or both spouses are below the minimum age of marriage.³⁰ Forced Marriage Protection Orders (FMPOs) offer additional situation-specific protection such as orders to deposit passports to prevent international travel. Breaches of FMPOs are criminalised.³¹

In addition to legal protection, people experiencing or threatened with forced marriage receive comprehensive support and advice from expert organisations such as the FMU, Karma Nirvana and Savera UK. This can help people resist a forced marriage, escape and rebuild their life.³²

The UK Government, anti-forced marriage organisations, researchers and affected communities also stress the need for accessible, meaningful and context-sensitive

²⁴Matrimonial Causes Act 1973, s 12(1)(c); Anitha and Gill (n 22).

²⁵Amrit Wilson, “The Forced Marriage Debate and the British State” (2007) 49(1) *Race & Class* 25; McCabe, Stickler and Baumeister (n 22).

²⁶Anitha and Gill (n 22) 165.

²⁷Gangoli, Razak and McCarry (n 7) 10; University of Derby, “Asma’s Story – Forced Marriage and Honour Based Abuse” (26 July 2016) <www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5T-P7tbiVE> accessed 13 March 2024; Khatidja Chantler and Melanie McCarry, “Forced Marriage, Coercive Control, and Conducive Contexts: The Experiences of Women in Scotland” (2020) 26 *Violence Against Women* 89.

²⁸Anitha and Gill (n 22); Chantler, Gangoli and Hester (n 20); McCabe, Stickler and Baumeister (n 22).

²⁹Savera UK, “Forced Marriage Factsheet” <www.saverauklearninghub.co.uk/forced-marriage-factsheet/> accessed 25 July 2023; White Rice, “Forced Marriages – Sara’s Story” (8 March 2010) <www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uh8F-XYBSfY> accessed 13 March 2024; Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, “Right to Choose: The Consequences of Forced Marriage” (21 October 2015) <www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSPx0a9tCOI> accessed 13 March 2024; Chantler and McCarry (n 27); Helen McCabe and Lauren Eglén, “I Bought You. You Are My Wife’: ‘Modern Slavery’ and Forced Marriage” (2022) *Journal of Human Trafficking* 1 <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23322705.2022.2096366?scroll=top&needAccess=true>> Chantler (n 20).

³⁰Age of Marriage Act (Northern Ireland) 1951, s 1; Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977, s 1; Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, s 121–122; Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015, s 16; Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act 2022, s 1.

³¹Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007; Forced Marriage etc. (Protection and Jurisdiction) (Scotland) Act 2011.

³²Gangoli, Razak and McCarry (n 7); Wilson (n 25); Chantler and McCarry (n 27); Chantler (n 20).

education, including through compulsory Relationships and Sex Education in secondary schools, to raise awareness, prevent and end the practice.³³

The educational potential of comics

Comics have always fulfilled an educational purpose. Indeed, their content as well as their form and style are supposed to be educational.³⁴ Comics are used as stand-alone material as well as to supplement other resources and teaching activities such as discussions, quizzes and comic-making.³⁵ To be educational, comics have to be accurate and realistic, clear and easy to read. The artwork and text should include detailed and diverse presentations of characters, settings, moods and tones that can be understood when reading the text and images together. The story should include a conflict that allows for debate and action.³⁶ These requirements for good educational comics indicate the necessity to teach the subject of a comic as well its form.³⁷

Comics require a high degree of interaction from readers of all ages and with different reading and language skills and preferences who use their multimodal literacy skills and imagination to understand and complete multilayered narratives, making reading comics a process of immersive discovery as well as learning.³⁸ This subjective process of meaning-making allows readers to connect with a story on a personal level.³⁹ It encourages tolerance of ambiguity, rich and open-minded discussion and collaborative problem solving that does not have one authoritative answer or solution.⁴⁰ It creates a low threshold to constructively and safely tackle tough or sensitive topics that might take students out of their comfort zone.⁴¹

³³Freedom Charity (n 6); Karma Nirvana, "Report Release" (n 6); Gangoli, Razak and McCarry (n 7); Gill and Harvey (n 21); Department for Education, "Statutory Guidance on Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education" (13 September 2021) <www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education> accessed 27 February 2024.

³⁴Carol L Tilley and Robert G Weiner, "Teaching and Learning with Comics" in Frank Bramlett, Roy T Cook and Aaron Meskin (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Comics* (Routledge 2017); Chris Murray and Golnar Nabizadeh, "Educational and Public Information Comics, 1940s–Present" (2020) 11 *Studies in Comics* 7.

³⁵Grace Cho, Hong Choi and Stephen Krashen, "Hooked on Comic Book Reading: How Comic Books Made an Impossible Situation Less Difficult" (2005) 33(4) *Knowledge Quest* 32; Michael Bitz, "A Rare Bridge: The Comic Book Project Connects Learning with Life" (2008) 39(4) *Teachers and Writers Magazine* 2; Maureen M Bakis, *The Graphic Novel Classroom: POWERful Teaching and Learning with Images* (SAGE 2012); Amine Harbi, "'He Isn't an Animal, He Isn't a Human, He Is Just Different': Exploring the Medium of Comics in Empowering Children's Critical Thinking" (2016) 7 *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 431.

³⁶Lila L Christensen, "Graphic Global Conflict: Graphic Novels in the High School Social Studies Classroom" (2006) 97 *The Social Studies* 227; Paula E Griffith, "Graphic Novels in the Secondary Classroom and School Libraries" (2010) 54 *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 181; Murray and Nabizadeh (n 34).

³⁷Christian W Chun, "Critical Literacies and Graphic Novels for English-Language Learners: Teaching *Maus*" (2009) 53 *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 144; Bakis (n 35).

³⁸Stergios Botzakis, "Adult Fans of Comic Books: What They Get Out of Reading" (2009) 53 *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 50; Chun (n 37); Murray and Nabizadeh (n 34).

³⁹Chun (n 37); Bree Akesson and Olufunke Oba, "Beyond Words: Comics in the Social Work Classroom" (2017) 53 *Journal of Social Work Education* 595; Courtney Donovan and Ebru Ustundag, "Graphic Narratives, Trauma and Social Justice" (2017) 11 *Visual Research and Social Justice* 221.

⁴⁰Bakis (n 35); Harbi (n 35).

⁴¹Thomas Juneau and Mira Sucharov, "Narratives in Pencil: Using Graphic Novels to Teach Israeli-Palestinian Relations" (2010) 11 *International Studies Perspectives* 172; Harbi (n 35); Akesson and Oba (n 39); Shirlene Obuobi, Monica B Vela and Brian Callender, "The Art of Medicine: Comics as Anti-Racist Education and Advocacy" (2021) 397 *The Lancet* 1615.

Comics are used to teach students, among others, about law and justice,⁴² and address important topics that might not always be foregrounded in the classroom⁴³ such as culture,⁴⁴ disability,⁴⁵ gender,⁴⁶ power,⁴⁷ relationships,⁴⁸ religion⁴⁹ and sexuality.⁵⁰ The history of comics as an alternative medium shows that they can offer complex topics and nuanced stories that encourage readers to explore their understanding of and movement in their social world and to engage empathetically with characters within and outside the pages.⁵¹ They urge readers to think critically, question society and the status quo, and challenge their assumptions, preconceptions and complacency.⁵² This way, comics help develop a deep understanding of and regard for social justice and the value of personal, creative and passionate expression.⁵³ Comic reading is a reflective and instructive act that affects behaviour and attitudes, even allowing rehearsal for reality.⁵⁴ Therefore, comics are “a natural choice for bringing ongoing social problems into question”.⁵⁵ They are inspiring and empowering, motivating readers to act together for a better world.⁵⁶

I Choose: Let's Talk about Forced Marriage

Our project aimed to demonstrate that comics are an effective medium to educate teenagers about forced marriage and to equip them to raise awareness and act as allies

⁴²Clare Sandford-Couch, “Challenging the Primacy of Text: The Role of the Visual in Legal Education” in Zenon Bankowski and Maksymilian Del Mar (eds), *The Moral Imagination and the Legal Life: Beyond Text in Legal Education* (Routledge 2013); Thomas Giddens (ed), *Graphic Justice: Intersections of Comics and Law* (Routledge 2015); Hannah Baumeister, “Drawing on Genocide” (2019) 13 *Law and Humanities* 3.

⁴³Chun (n 37).

⁴⁴Daniel Stein, “The Black Politics of Newspaper Comic Strips: Teaching Aaron McGruder’s *The Boondocks* and Keith Knights’ *The K Chronicles*” in Lan Dong (ed), *Teaching Comics and Graphic Narratives: Essays on Theory, Strategy and Practice* (McFarland 2012); Akesson and Oba (n 39).

⁴⁵SM Squier, “So Long as They Grow Out of It: Comics, the Discourse of Developmental Normalcy, and Disability” (2008) 29 *Journal of Medical Humanities* 71; Erin Pritchard, “The Intersection of Dwarfism and Gender in Alisa’s Tale: Raising Awareness through Graphic Narrative” (2022) 12(1) *The Comics Grid* <<https://www.comicsgrid.com/article/id/6484/>> accessed 12 June 2024.

⁴⁶Judith Richards and Cynthia M Williams, “Performing the Veil: Gender and Resistance in Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* and Shirin Neshat’s Photography” in Lan Dong (ed), *Teaching Comics and Graphic Narratives: Essays on Theory, Strategy and Practice* (McFarland 2012); Jessica Baldanzi, “Beyond Hair Bows and Cleavage: Helping Women Draw Their Iconic Selves” in David D Seelow (ed), *Lessons Drawn: Essays on the Pedagogy of Comics and Graphic Novels* (McFarland 2019).

⁴⁷Chun (n 37); Obuobi, Vela and Callender (n 41).

⁴⁸Jennifer Gonzalez, “Graphic Novels in the Classroom: A Teacher Roundtable” (*Cult of Pedagogy*, 9 October 2016) <www.cultofpedagogy.com/teaching-graphic-novels/> accessed 21 February 2024.

⁴⁹Kenneth T Carano and Jeremiah Clabough, “Images of Struggle: Teaching Human Rights with Graphic Novels” (2016) 107 *The Social Studies* 14.

⁵⁰Ajuan Mance, “LGBTQ Representation in Comics” in Frank Bramlett, Roy T Cook and Aaron Meskin (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Comics* (Routledge 2017).

⁵¹Gretchen Schwarz, “Graphic Novels, New Literacies, and Good Old Social Justice” (2010) 37(3) *The Alan Review* 71; Akesson and Oba (n 39); Shawyn C Domyancich-Lee, Leah R Cleeland and Jennifer S McCleary, “Teaching Note – Comics in the Classroom: Teaching with Graphic Novels” (2022) 58 *Journal of Social Work Education* 579.

⁵²Chun (n 37); Juneau and Sucharov (n 41); Schwarz, “Graphic Novels, New Literacies” (n 51); Akesson and Oba (n 39).

⁵³Bitz (n 35); Gretchen Schwarz, “Graphic Novels: New Sites of Possibility in the Secondary Curriculum” (2009–2010) 12(1/2) *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue* 53; Schwarz, “Graphic Novels, New Literacies” (n 51); Bakis (n 35).

⁵⁴Botzakis (n 38); Chun (n 37).

⁵⁵Schwarz, “Graphic Novels, New Literacies” (n 51) 71.

⁵⁶Schwarz, “Graphic Novels, New Literacies” (n 51); Murray and Nabizadeh (n 34).

to those affected. To this end, we created a comic that is grounded in the existing research about forced marriage and educational comics summarised above, echoed, underscored and illuminated by the knowledge and experience of the project team.⁵⁷ The comic entitled *I Choose: Let's Talk about Forced Marriage* tells seven stories about different forms, drivers and consequences of forced marriage, focusing on possibilities for resistance and intervention.

Illustrating research on the universality of forced marriage and the age and gender prevalence among victims, five protagonists are female and three are male teenagers from different ethnic backgrounds living in the UK. One story, *The Bigger Picture*, is illustrated with an androgynous main character. Characters' ages and ethnic backgrounds are deliberately open to interpretation to enhance relatability and encourage critical discussion. The age of one protagonist, Emina, is specified as 16 to allow conversation about the minimum age of marriage in the different UK nations. To demonstrate that forced marriage is not a religious problem, no reference is made to characters' faiths.

Images setting the protagonists and their families in community contexts illustrate research emphasising that forced marriages are formed by men and women who are known to victims and act together in a wider social context to pressure them to get married in the UK or their country of origin. This, as well as intentionally ambiguous references to "[them]" persuading Emina to get married, encourages nuanced discussion about perpetrator characteristics and the complex dynamics at play.

This also indicates that perpetrators of forced marriage are not evil villains. Instead, research stresses that they are driven by multilayered social and economic factors. Illustrating this, the comic stories show that perpetrators act on their beliefs in tradition, concern for their family's reputation and honour as well as for their child's welfare and future, a wish to cement family ties, social pressure, and financial debt. Chen's mother, for example, is opposed to his relationship with Daniel and concerned about its effect on their family's reputation and Chen's future life. Additionally, she demonstrates her belief in tradition when she reminds Chen's father that "It's just the way it's done. It's the way we met, remember?". Emina, who has a disability, is pressured to marry "so that her future husband can help her" and "take care of her". Azedah and Jay are brought together to honour their fathers' long-standing friendship. Becca is sold into marriage to clear her father's debt.

The stories subtly reflect research about the continuum between consent and force, socialisation into marriage and the experience of non-physical pressure by most victim-survivors. For example, neither Azedah nor her (future) husband Jay asked for their marriage to be arranged and they did not freely consent to the match, indicating a slippage between arranged and forced marriage for both. Azedah feels obliged to "agree" to marry Jay in return for her parents' support for her education and to maintain a relationship with them. Her story indicates that her younger sisters are socialised into marriage, including by observing her marriage preparations. Like Emina, they might not know they have a choice. Emina's story is also designed to spark discussions about the legal capacity to consent. Focusing on the bounded nature of consent and the slippage between arranged and forced marriage rather than portraying acts of physical violence ensures that the comic is not unnecessarily distressing but encourages empathetic

⁵⁷Hannah Baumeister, "So You Want to Make a Comic 2: How We Did It" (20 October 2023) <<https://drawingon.blog/2023/10/20/so-you-want-to-make-a-comic-2-how-we-did-it/>> accessed 17 March 2023.

engagement and nuanced discussion about free and full consent as the (legal) foundation of (a valid) marriage and the illegality of forced marriage.

Reflecting research on the consequences of forced marriage and its relationship to modern slavery, Becca's story ends in a marriage where her movement, labour and sexuality are controlled by her husband, indicating her enslavement. Emina's story, *The Friend* and *The Bigger Picture* end openly before the protagonists are forced to marry. They allow readers to complete stories based on available information and enable discussions about negative impacts of forced marriage on victims' independence, health and well-being, education and social life. Avoiding graphic depictions to minimise potential triggers, the consequences of forced marriage are communicated, for example, through panel formats and the use of colour. In Emina's story, for instance, the last panel is narrower than the others, suggesting that her world would become smaller with the marriage, that going to the park on her own or continuing her education might not be an option. The darker colours and fallen petals indicate low mood, dread and impending loss.

To inspire and empower readers, all stories create opportunities for intervention and resistance that are also explored in forced marriage research. Azedah appeals to her parents, attempting to postpone and ultimately avoid her marriage. Chen might leave his family for the same reason. All stories include trusted persons that protagonists could reach out to such as friends, neighbours, teachers, health workers and the police. *The Friend* familiarises trusted persons with possible signs of forced marriage and suggests help and support they could offer. The stories of Azedah, Becca and *The Friend* make reference to expert organisations that support victim-survivors, including by applying for FMPOs. By highlighting that everyone has a role to play in preventing and ending forced marriage by looking out for their loved ones, the stories aim to build communities of care with a deep understanding of and regard for social justice.

The storytelling, format and artistic presentation of the stories are guided by the advice given in the existing literature on educational comics. The stories are one to eight pages long so that they can be read quickly in class. They are image-driven with additional information presented in speech bubbles and sparse use of captions. Images are drawn in a colourful, realistic style without superfluous detail. This way, the comic tells rich stories that are accessible and appealing to a diverse audience. The open representation of different forms, causes and consequences of forced marriage and opportunities for intervention and resistance allows readers to become immersed in the stories and discover them on a personal level. It encourages safe and open-minded yet critical discussions of issues to which there might not be an authoritative, straightforward answer.

Findings from the trial sessions

We trialled Emina's story as teaching material in two sessions with 19 students aged 12 to 14 in two secondary schools in different parts of England. Our findings demonstrate that our comic is an effective tool to educate teenagers about forced marriage and support them to raise awareness and become allies to those at risk or already experiencing it.

Based on students' availability, one trial session spanned a full school day, the other one a period of 50 minutes. The full-day session covered comic literacy, a discussion about forced marriage based on Emina's story, and an opportunity for students to make

their own comics creating alternative endings to it. In the 50-minute session, we used Emina's story to teach comic literacy as well as content about forced marriage. In planning the sessions, we followed the advice provided in the literature on comics and pedagogy to teach the form and subject of the comic, to use the comic alone and in combination with other teaching and learning activities such as quizzes as a basis for participatory learning and discussion, and to allow students to create, not just receive, information about forced marriage in a personal and creative way.⁵⁸

To assess the comic's effectiveness as a teaching tool, we drew on Krusemark's study. She used questionnaires with rating scale and open-ended questions to collect qualitative and quantitative data to explore how comics engage critical thinking in a group of 17 American college students. Her students took the questionnaires before and after reading a comic. Krusemark assessed quantitative data using average (mean) scores and grounded theory to analyse qualitative data.⁵⁹

Krusemark used questionnaires to assess how comics engage critical thinking, a skill that lies at the heart of our project. To learn about forced marriage, awareness raising and allyship, students have to think critically, for example, about questions of consent, trust and their movement in their social world.

Krusemark's study suggests that questionnaires can be used in small-scale studies like hers with 17 participants and ours with 19. They are a recognised research method to engage adults like Krusemark's American college students and children like our research participants.⁶⁰

We followed Krusemark's example and used questionnaires completed at the beginning and end of the trial sessions – as well as at the mid-point of the full-day session – to quickly and effectively assess the comic's impact on students' understanding of forced marriage and their likelihood to raise awareness and act as allies to those affected. To increase the scope and depth of the questionnaire data and to verify it, we also considered our observations and conversations with students in our assessment of the effectiveness of the comic as a teaching tool.⁶¹

Like Krusemark, we opted for a combination of rating scale and open-ended questions. The rating scale questions asked students to assess their level of knowledge about forced marriage and their likelihood to raise awareness, help someone at risk or already experiencing it, and share the comic with others. Open-ended questions asked for an example of what students had learned about forced marriage, what they could do to make a difference, and how the comic could be improved. The combination of rating scale and open-ended questions "invite[s] honest, personal comment . . . in addition to ticking numbers and boxes".⁶² We used five-point rating scales as a recognised way to measure students' level of knowledge and attitudes.⁶³ We addressed limitations of

⁵⁸Hannah Baumeister and others, "I Choose: Let's Talk about Forced Marriage – Educator Guidance" (2023) <<https://drawingonblog.files.wordpress.com/2024/01/educator-guidance-wp-9124.pdf>> accessed 17 March 2023.

⁵⁹Renee Krusemark, "Comic Books in the American College Classroom: A Study of Student Critical Thinking" (2017) 8 *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 59.

⁶⁰Social Change UK, "How to Do Research with Children" <https://social-change.co.uk/files/Knowledge_Hub_-_How_to_do_research_with_children.pdf> accessed 13 March 2024; Anne Greig, Jayne Taylor and Tommy MacKay, *Doing Research with Children: A Practical Guide* (SAGE 2013) 146–202; Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education* (Routledge 2018) 471–505.

⁶¹Cohen, Manion and Morrison (n 60) 471.

⁶²*ibid* 476.

⁶³*ibid* 480–81, 483–84.

rating scales such as inadequate categories, subjective interpretations of scale points and a tendency to opt for the mid-point⁶⁴ by combining rating scales with open-ended questions. Open-ended questions allowed students to explain and qualify their answers to the rating scale questions. Question prompts defined the boundaries of answers sought in open-ended questions.⁶⁵

Like Krusemark, through the questionnaires with rating scale and open-ended questions, we gathered complementary quantitative and qualitative data to capture trends as well as rich detail to gain a rounded understanding of the comic's effectiveness as a teaching tool.⁶⁶

We followed Krusemark's example and assessed the quantitative data from the rating scale questions using average (mean) scores to represent the typical or most representative value in the dataset. We diverted from her study and followed Harbi⁶⁷ in assessing the data from open-ended questions by tracking recurring ideas and grouping them into themes, relating them back to the literature on forced marriage.

We found that the comic is an effective tool to teach young teenagers about forced marriage.⁶⁸ The level of students' knowledge about forced marriage rose from 3.05 at the beginning of the session to 3.88 at the end. In respectful conversations and answers to open-ended questionnaire questions, students demonstrated their critical understanding of the concept of forced marriage and its different forms, causes and consequences, echoing existing research. Students showed a good understanding of consent and the necessity to ensure consent of both parties as the key component of a valid marriage when they suggested to "make sure both the people want to get married". However, they also recognised that "people might be too scared to admit that they don't want to get married" and "will not always openly disagree", indicating an understanding of expectations, pressure and a sense of obligation that can bind and invalidate consent. In addition to the importance of free and full consent that can be circumscribed and invalidated by coercion, students understood that consent is age-related and that "marriage is illegal for ppl under 18" and "classed as a forced marriage". However, one student suggested that making forced marriage illegal would make a difference. Students also understood that both parties must have capacity to consent that can be undermined by a disability and yet disability can be a risk factor of forced marriage. Regarding other risk factors and identity markers of potential victims of forced marriage, students demonstrated an awareness that forced marriage "can happen to anyone", "not just women", and therefore can affect both parties to a marriage. This was also indicated in discussions about potential consequences of forced marriage. Some students posited that a shared experience of forced marriage could bring spouses closer together. While this is not supported by the literature on forced marriage, there is evidence that forced marriages do not have to lead to unhealthy or abusive relationships. As some students thought, marriages in which both spouses were forced into the commitment can lead to them living together but leading separate lives.⁶⁹ In line with the literature, some students argued that the notion of a forced marriage stands in clear

⁶⁴ibid 481–85.

⁶⁵ibid 476.

⁶⁶ibid 31–49.

⁶⁷Harbi (n 35).

⁶⁸Hannah Baumeister and others, "Data from: Drawing on Forced Marriage" (Liverpool John Moores University, 5 March 2024 [dataset]) <<https://opendata.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/178/>> accessed 13 March 2024.

⁶⁹Gangoli, Razak and McCarry (n 7).

opposition to that of independence and that a forced marriage could lead to loss of independence, unhappiness, increased stress levels that could have a negative impact on education and a change in behaviour of those affected.

In addition to improving their understanding of forced marriage, the second rating scale question about the level of students' likelihood to raise awareness demonstrated that students would "maybe" raise awareness, the average score being 3.22 at the beginning of the session and 3.78 at the end. Students' increased likelihood to raise awareness reflects the literature on the potential of comics to create change in attitudes and behaviour. Interestingly, the raw data from the questionnaires completed at the full-day session shows the highest scores in the mid-day round and a more diffuse picture emerging at the end when the majority of students state that they would "maybe" or "definitely" raise awareness. This indicates the reliability of the questionnaire results. Students did not simply give the answers they thought we wanted. It could also indicate that students gained a more nuanced understanding of forced marriage and awareness raising that complicates the question of how to raise awareness in a sensitive and safe way. Compared to the responses from the full-day session, answers to this question from the shorter one are more varied. Students in the longer session may have offered less varied answers as a result of prolonged exposure to each other's opinions, thereby creating limited, peer-approved answers. In the shorter session, students had limited time to consult with each other which may have led to a wider variety of answers.

The third rating scale question focused on the level of students' likelihood to help someone at risk or already experiencing forced marriage. As with the responses to the previous two questions, the average results show a positive effect of the comic on students' understanding, attitudes and behaviours. While the increase in students' likelihood to help was less sharp, rising from 4 at the beginning of the session to 4.15 at the end, it nevertheless confirms the findings in the existing literature on the potential of comics to encourage readers to act for a better world. While students did not ask for clarification, the difference in answers to this and the previous question might be due to uncertainty around the meaning of awareness raising. It might also indicate that students confidently subscribe to the value of helping others and/or suggest a preference for direct intervention as a way to end forced marriage. In response to the open-ended question about how students think they could make a difference about forced marriage, both awareness raising and direct intervention were mentioned. For example, one student's response reads "spread awareness about it" while another suggested to "recommend different helplines". By constructively mentioning "more thorough ... welfare checks" and suggesting to "ask [the person] if there are any concerns", students indicated a broad understanding of possible interventions that engage the victim as well as third parties, as suggested by expert organisations.⁷⁰ Students recognised that "anyone can help", including neighbours, the police and social workers. Answers like "don't do it say no" and "tell someone you [trust] if it affects you" indicate an understanding that victims of forced marriage have agency and can use opportunities for resistance, reflecting understandings advanced in forced marriage research. However, as emphasised in the literature, students also recognised that that might not always be possible or can be challenging. Therefore, they suggested to "help the

⁷⁰Savera UK, "Forced Marriage Factsheet" (n 29).

person to get confident enough to explain to her parents why they don't want [to get married]". While the statement recognised victim-survivors' agency in a context that might be coercive or present limited options, answers that suggested to involve victims' families stand in contrast to advice given by expert organisations that stress the potential danger of such interventions.⁷¹ However, they might reflect experts' advice to speak to a trusted person. That way, they indicate the difficult and conflicting situation a person threatened with forced marriage by a loved one might find themselves in. They might stem from an awareness that perpetrators seldom intend to harm victims and instead believe they are doing the right thing and therefore could be persuaded otherwise. Answers suggesting to involve victims' parents might also be based on the assumption that other family or community members are the driving force behind a forced marriage. In that case, however, they would disregard the pressure that might be exerted on parents to comply.

At the end of the sessions, students responded to the fourth rating scale question that they would "maybe", almost "likely", share the comic with others (3.94 average score). Reflecting the literature on the educational potential of comics, students' suggestions for improvement demonstrated their investment in the story. They expressed a desire for more information, suggesting to "make [the story] longer" and "add more ... backstory". While the story and discussions reflected the literature on forced marriage and emphasised that perpetrators of forced marriage are not necessarily evil and that the crux of forced marriages is the lack of consent rather than the nature of the relationship, students specifically asked for "more ... input about the husband [and whether] he's evil". This indicates empathetic engagement as well as a possibly age-related desire for more clear cut stories that are "more obvious[ly] ... about forced marriage" and show tidy endings of "how [the victim] can be saved". However, as discussed in the literature on comics and pedagogy, intentional grey areas might be more helpful to learning and understanding as students might mull over their frustration with narrative uncertainties long after they have left the classroom. In this part of the questionnaire, students also critically engaged with the comic as an item and demonstrated their learning in comic literacy and comic-making, making constructive suggestions about the wording in and design of the story. Students suggested to continuously refer to the protagonist's husband as "future husband" and having him faded might clarify that they are not yet married. Students also suggested to have "bigger speech bubbles [to make them easier] to read or/and separating the speech bubbles so that they don't look so lengthy". Here, students confirmed findings of existing research on the educational potential of comics as they became creators, not just passive recipients, of knowledge.

Conclusion

In summary, the research demonstrated that our comic is an effective tool to teach young teenagers about forced marriage and to equip them to raise awareness and act as allies to those at risk or already experiencing it. The comic worked as the sole basis for discussion as well as in combination with other learning and teaching activities. Our observations and discussions with students indicated that the comic is an effective tool to continuously engage

⁷¹ibid.

female and male students from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds with different learning needs and differing levels of familiarity with comics as a medium. The questionnaire responses demonstrated that students gained a better understanding of the law related to (forced) marriage, drivers and risk factors, the pressure on victim-survivors and how it affects their ability and capacity to consent, potential consequences and possibilities for direct resistance and multilayered interventions. Discussions in the sessions and students' questionnaire responses reflected issues raised in the existing literature on forced marriage and generally echoed its findings. They also confirm existing research finding that comics are an effective tool to educate readers about tough topics and to influence their attitudes and behaviour, encouraging them to act for a better world.

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