

Forced Marriage: How the Faults of Our Social Hierarchy Contribute to a Worldwide Human Rights Violation

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Abstract

Forced marriage is where either one or both people involved do not consent to the marriage. Child marriage is also a type of forced marriage since a child cannot consent. This worldwide practice is a human rights violation which disproportionately affects young girls and women and is extremely harmful. This is a paper presentation that explores and shares findings of how forced and child marriage is portrayed in Canadian news media. This paper also reviews the various social determinants that reinforces this practice. Using the LexisNexus database, we searched news articles with the keywords “forced marriage”, “Canada”, “media”, “portrayal”. Our sample consists of 30 Canadian news articles ranging from January 2000 to January 2020. Three themes emerged from our findings: 1) Canada as a ‘saving grace’, 2) Religion as a scapegoat for forced marriage, 3) How Canada’s laws reinforce forced marriage. Our findings reveal that Canadian media portrays Canada as a human rights advocate, condemning countries that openly practice forced marriage and actively donating to the victims in other countries. However, our findings also reveal that Canada not only practices child marriage, but also completely fails to acknowledge and address this issue. Therefore, our findings suggest that Canada uses the media to portray forced marriage as a damning issue in other countries, while actively ignoring the same issue in Canada. This is significant because this portrayal in the media allows forced and child marriage to continue in Canada, putting more young girls and women at risk. We hope to bring awareness to this issue so that it can finally be addressed.

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