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GENDER, MIGRATION AND EXCLUSIONARY CITIZENSHIP REGIMES:  
CONCEPTUALISING TRANSNATIONAL ABANDONMENT OF WIVES AS A FORM OF  
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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## ABSTRACT

Based on life-history narratives of 57 women in India and interviews with 21 practitioners, we document the neglect, abuse and instrumental deprivation of the women's rights through the process of transnational abandonment. While gendered local socio-cultural milieus and economic norms contribute to these harms, they are crucially enabled and sustained by transnational formal-legal frameworks. Widening the explanatory lens for understanding domestic violence beyond the family and community, we argue that in a globalised world, (inter)state policies serve to construct these women as a subordinate category of citizens - 'disposable women' - who can be abused and abandoned with impunity.

There is now a wide range of evidence that highlights the worldwide scope and magnitude of domestic violence (Heise et al., 2002; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). Research indicates the common origins and explanations for such violence – patriarchal cultures which manifest themselves in particular ways in different social and historical contexts (Hunnicut, 2009; Ogle & Batton, 2009) and social constructs of gender which devalue women and relegate them to the private sphere (Purkayastha et al., 2003). However, it is equally important to understand the specific forms that violence against women takes in particular contexts, not least in order to develop effective responses to it.

There is extensive evidence to show that violence against wives perpetrated by husbands and their relatives is widespread in India (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Dave & Solanki, 2000; Panchanadeswaran & Koverola, 2005) and that the laws to protect women against such violence and to punish the perpetrators have been largely ineffective (Gangoli & Rew, 2011; Kapur & Cossman, 1996). Violence against wives takes place in a context of patri-virilocalty where marriage entails relocation into a male-headed household in which the new bride occupies a subordinate status. These norms have gendered implications and serve to limit women's autonomy of action as they are considered an 'outsider' in the marital family – at least in the initial years following marriage – and the lack of proximity to effective support networks serves to limit women's options in case of marital violence. Women's subordinate status in her marital household also brings benefits to the husband (and his family) that include domestic labour and material advantages from any paid work (Kandiyoti, 1988), and is reinforced through coercive control and domestic violence for perceived violations of gender norms (Purkayastha et al., 2003). Dowry is widely regarded as one of the main structures through which domestic violence is perpetrated (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Rastogi & Therly, 2006). Other particular contexts for such violence include the birth of a female child (Purewal, 2010) and policing constraints on women's sexuality (Gill, 2004). Women adopt multiple coping strategies including minimising the abuse, placating the abuser, answering back, avoidance behaviour and active help-seeking, as they contest, negotiate and reproduce patriarchal relations in

a context where marriage remains primary marker of status and identity for women (Chaudhuri et al., 2014; Panchanadeswaran & Koverola, 2005).

The distances entailed in transnational marriages may exacerbate women's vulnerabilities, as absence of relational networks in their husband's country of residence serves to isolate women from potential allies and informal sources of support. Research on the problem of domestic violence faced by South Asian marriage migrants in the diaspora shows a replication of the patterns of abuse that women face in India. These are compounded by additional factors such as racism and stereotyped service responses that draw on notions of commonness and even acceptance of abuse in certain social groups (Batsleer et al., 2002), lack of adequate support in the form of welfare services, public housing, health services and language barriers in the absence of adequate translation services (Raj & Silverman, 2002; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). Research (Abraham 2008; Anitha, 2011) points out how marriage migrants experience added vulnerabilities when their residency is tied to their marriage, as being divorced or disowned by their husbands could mean deportation and separation from their children. However, little is known about the experiences of women who remain residents in their countries of origin following a transnational marriage, that is, those who migrated but returned, and those for whom the opportunity to migrate never came to be realised.

#### THE PROBLEM OF ABANDONMENT IN TRANSNATIONAL MARRIAGES

Media reports in India, corroborated by non-governmental organisations and government institutions, suggest a growing problem of the abandonment of wives by Indian-origin men who are residents of another country. In 2008, the Indian government nominated the National Commission for Woman (NCW) to respond to issues pertaining to Non-Resident Indian (NRI)<sup>1</sup> marriages, which they estimate affects several thousand women (NCW, undated). Media reports and anecdotal accounts from women's organisations in the West (Dasgupta & Rudra, 2009) and in India (Jabbi, 2005) have confirmed that transnational abandonment of wives is a growing problem. However, little is known about the nature of this problem and women's experiences during and

following the process of abandonment, as there has been scant research on this subject, especially one which brings forth the voices and perspectives of abandoned women.

Based on the extent and nature of calls from women abandoned across transnational spaces who contact Southall Black Sisters (SBS)<sup>2</sup> its Director, Pragna Patel delineates three main forms that such abandonment takes:

- i) A woman migrating upon marriage is subjected to domestic violence and thrown out of the marital home, or less commonly, flees to escape the abuse, and is barred from returning;
- ii) Following marriage migration and abuse, a woman is taken to her home-country deceptively (e.g., on the pretence of a holiday) and abandoned there and her visa is revoked;
- iii) An NRI comes to India to marry and leaves shortly afterwards with assurances that he will sponsor his wife's spouse visa, but fails to do so – the woman is left with her in-laws in India and is eventually thrown out or leaves because of domestic violence.

The majority of the women we interviewed experienced the second and third categories of abandonment, while seven marriage migrants fled the abuse and were subsequently abandoned. This article focuses on women's experiences of neglect, coercive control, physical and sexual abuse and denial of reproductive rights and eventual abandonment. While the exploitation of women's labour and dowry abuse was a significant finding from our study, these issues are explored elsewhere and beyond the scope of this paper.

#### RESEARCH METHODS AND THEORETICAL GROUNDING

The aim of this study was to understand the problem of transnational abandonment of wives in three states in India – Punjab, Gujarat and Delhi. This paper explores the experiences of 57 women abandoned by husbands who were resident in a range of countries, primarily in the global north. Additionally, 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of practitioners. Objectives included: understanding the contexts of the marriage decision; exploring the nature of women's relationship with their husband and in-laws; documenting any experiences of abuse within the marital relationship; analysing the impact of abandonment and gathering women's

experiences of legal mechanisms and assessing their effectiveness. Additionally, a key objective of the research was to stimulate policy debates to address this problem. Ethical approval was obtained from the School of Social and Political Sciences Research Ethics Committee, University of Lincoln.

The states of Punjab, Gujarat and Delhi were selected for this research as Punjab and Gujarat have a long and diverse history of out-migration going back to the period of British colonial rule, while the capital Delhi has a large number of families who are part of global circuits of work and travel. Transnational marriages remain desirable in India because of the positive representations of life in the West compared to the relative poverty and lack of security within India, and long-standing cultures of migration, among other factors. A combination of a convenience sample and snowballing technique was utilised to access abandoned women, combined with a purposive sample of key informants.

This research draws upon and advances existing debates that traverse three broad areas of theoretical and empirical inquiry - gender-based violence, gender and migration, and gendered citizenship. The researchers were informed by their feminist research praxis which entails a commitment to deploying an intersectional lens to come to a holistic understanding of women's lived experiences as well as their constructions of and perceptions about these experiences. The life history method was chosen because of its capacity to enable research participants to reflect on their lives as a whole and to locate particular experiences such as their marriage decision, the nature of their relationship with their husband and in-laws as well as the impact of the abandonment in the context of broader power relations, opportunities and constraints that shape their lives. Through life history interviews, the specificity of women's lives and experiences at the intersection of various axes of disadvantage and vulnerability structured by gender, class, caste and region, as well as opportunities – for instance, marrying an NRI man is one kind of gendered/classed privilege in a context where other avenues for South Asian migration are increasingly closing down – came into clearer focus. The impetus to view these factors as mutually constitutive of women's

experiences, instead of a fragmented, additive understanding of social positioning (Yuval-Davis, 2006) led us to using life history interviews as a method in combination with principles of a feminist constructivist grounded theory, as discussed below.

The interviews, which lasted between one to three hours, were transcribed verbatim where women gave permission to record them. In the few cases where such permission was not given, notes were taken and typed up soon after the interview. The aim was not to seek a representative sample but instead to undertake an in-depth exploration of women's experiences. Apart from the few research participants who were accessed through snowball sampling, most women were accessed through police, women's groups and lawyers, as this remains a hidden issue due to stigma, therefore making it difficult to access respondents.

Interviews with representatives of community and women's organisations, police and lawyers specialising in abandoned women's casework gathered practitioner perspectives on the nature of this problem, their practice responses to it and recommendations. This sampling frame was selected because the researchers were aware (through their ongoing work with women's organisations in India and the UK) that some women who were abandoned eventually sought support from service providers such as the police, lawyers, politicians, and third sector organisations, to name a few. These service providers were interviewed in order to pursue an understanding of transnational marriage abandonment inspired by Dorothy Smith's (1999) concept of 'institutional ethnography,' whereby the ethnographic gaze is on the operation of 'relations of ruling' upon people (in our case, abandoned women) who are subject to those regimes of power. Smith's methodology seeks to understand the workings of institutions, the categories and conceptual frameworks of their administration and the slippages between knowledge produced within institutions and everyday lives of those subject to those institutions.

A limitation of this study relates to its reach. This research has managed to reach very few women who have not sought help from formal sources of support, perhaps due to stigma, lack of resources, or indeed unfamiliarity with criminal justice processes. Despite this limitation, as one of the first

systematic studies on this topic, this research has significant implications for our understanding of this emerging form of violence against women.

Principles of a constructivist grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2006) were combined with narrative analysis (Kallivayalil, 2010; Ruth and Oberg, 1996) to arrive at an intersectional understanding of women's experiences and contexts within a framework of analysis shaped by the goals and values of feminist research. The grounded theory method, originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967, 1998) and extended by others, put forward a way of developing theory that is grounded in the systematic gathering and analysis of data, instead of an imposition of theory on to data. The traditional grounded theory was, however, criticised for viewing interview participants merely as 'sources of data which can be emptied'. The concept of 'constructivist grounded theory' as put forward by Charmaz (2006) subsequently addressed the question of the relationship between the researcher and participants as one of mutual co-construction of meaning and reality; instead of the researcher 'discovering' meaning in the data (Allen, 2011). Constructivist grounded theory is critical of the positivist and objectivist assumptions behind traditional grounded theory such as that of the researcher as a *tabula rasa*, who approaches the field with no preconceived conceptualisations of the problem or knowledge – or where such knowledge exists, manages to put them aside. The assumption here is that a clean slate enables the researcher to objectively and inductively arrive at a theory based on the data alone, and uncontaminated by the researcher's positionality or conceptual baggage. For Charmaz, theory-building in the feminist constructivist approach denies the possibility or indeed the desirability of such objectivism and acknowledges the mutual creation of knowledge. Such an approach recognises the positionality and indeed the politics of the researcher within and through which she moves towards an interpretive and subjective understanding of meanings (Charmaz, 2003, p. 250).

One principle of traditional grounded theory that we found it difficult to apply in practice was theoretical sampling – where interviews are conducted concurrently with data analysis till no new conceptual categories emerge. This was due to a combination of factors. The difficulty of access

meant that the fieldwork had to be conducted in phases during which the researchers immersed themselves in the field and conducted interviews which could only be transcribed and analysed later, when the technological facilities were available. The variability in women's experiences – e.g., the different categories of abandonment, the presence of children or none, rural/urban location – also impacted on the process of consolidating and stabilising the categories. As this was one of the first systematic studies on the subject, we were concerned that we might only hear/read what we understood and thereby miss important data or new categories of women who experienced such abandonment by ending the research process too soon. It was only later that it became evident that we could have ended data collection somewhat sooner than we did, as no new categories emerged in the final few interviews.

### Data analysis

Data analysis of the transcripts and conceptual development was an iterative process that was supplemented through memo-writing, fieldnotes and team meetings where the researchers compared initial insights. Data analysis entailed an approach that integrated narrative analysis with principles of constructivist grounded theory, as described by Ruth and Oberg (1996) and Kallivayalil (2010). Each life history was summarised, the main features identified, and categorised according to its content (e.g., categories of abandonment, presence of children, etc). A close reading of the first fourteen transcripts was accompanied by a process of continuous coding that captured significant concepts within each narrative. The next stage entailed accumulating the concepts from across the narratives into emerging patterns and themes whereby higher-level categories were identified through an iterative process of constant comparison of the coded transcripts. At this stage, conceptual explanations for similarities and differences and for the relationships between categories were sought. For each emerging theme, axial coding was utilised to identify contexts, manifestations, women's interpretations of the given phenomenon, women's actions and its consequences. For example, neglect emerged as a significant (and to the researchers, a somewhat unexpected) theme where the axial coding enabled us to examine the contexts in which

it emerged, the many ways in which such neglect manifested itself, women's constructions of such neglect and the meanings they attached to it, their responses to it through management, resistance or negotiation and its consequences for women.

Utilising a process of constant comparative analysis - a hallmark of grounded theory - between and within texts as well as between categories enabled the development of the theoretical concepts. This process was repeated with the remaining transcripts. A constructivist grounded theory method that entailed a persistent interaction with data while being involved in emerging analysis was utilised to build a set of theoretical and analytical explanations (Charmaz, 2005; Allen, 2011). This entailed moving from the detailed and descriptive to the more abstract, conceptual level – e.g., the concepts of disposability and of gendered geographies of power - and back.

In accordance with the principles of narrative analysis, when reading and coding each narrative, the aim was not simply to identify the emergent concepts in each narrative, or common themes and divergent perspectives on particular themes. Equally important was a structural analysis of the narratives whereby the focus was not just on the themes that were articulated but also on the contexts in which they emerged in the narrative, and equally on the telling – the lived, affective accounts of women's experiences and the ways in which the narratives are structured and what the language in the stories does both at the textual as well as the social and cultural level. Riessman (2008) argues that the interpretive approach of narrative analysis is very well suited to studying critical life events. The salient features of this approach include identification of key events in the life story with particular attention to temporality and sequence of events; the causality attributed to different events and the connection/link participants attribute to these events; the structure of the narrative; exploration of what particular life-events meant for the participant at the time as well as what they meant at the time of the interview; and the agency of the participant within their story and its socio-cultural context. Such an approach enables individual narratives to be situated within particular contexts, alerting the researcher to the broader socio-cultural context of the narratives (Riessman, 2008) and to the structural preconditions of personal experience. Life history methods,

along with an intersectional feminist lens allowed us to take into account the structural aspects of women's lives, and to contextualise the meanings they gave to their experiences, by locating them in their personal-historical and material reality.

#### CHARTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN TRANSNATIONAL MARRIAGES

Twenty-eight of the 57 women interviewed for this research had been married to men resident in the UK, eight of the husbands were from Italy, four each from Australia and USA, and the remaining 13 were from a range of other countries. The women belonged to a range of castes, which indicates the prevalence of abandonment across the caste-hierarchies. A majority of our sample were university educated (69%) but unemployed (54%). The over-representation of middle-class women in our sample could reflect the social class of women marrying NRIs, because of the large dowries involved in such marriages. It could also reflect the ways in which we accessed our sample through lawyers and police, as those with financial resources and social capital are more likely to access these agencies. Where women had educational qualifications and lived in a city or a large town they were more likely to be employed. It was not possible to find out the educational background or jobs held by the husbands, as many women - including those who had migrated following marriage - were not aware of these details. The demographic characteristics of the women and statistics relating to the nature of domestic abuse they experienced are as follows:

Insert table 1 about here

Twenty-three women - just over a third of the research participants - migrated following marriage. In the context of ongoing and escalating violence, these women were deceptively taken back to India and abandoned there or less commonly, left the marital home to escape the abuse and were prevented from returning. Just under two-thirds of the women we interviewed never migrated following their marriage. Following a speedily arranged marriage and exchange of dowry, the husband would depart for his country of residence, leaving his wife to live with the in-laws, in

keeping with socio-cultural norms in India. The expectation was that he would apply for a spouse visa to enable her to join him, a process that can take months. While she waited for the visa, he would communicate with her, and might visit on holidays, but eventually the communication would fade away. During this period, she was responsible for domestic labour and caring for her in-laws, who would also demand ongoing dowry transfers from her parents. Eventually, she was cast out of the affinal home or left, following escalating violence. Common to both categories of women, ex-parte divorce proceedings were initiated by the husband in his country of residence, often without the woman's knowledge or consent.

Each woman's account of suffering, resistance and quest for justice was unique, but there emerged some similarities in women's experiences of abuse and abandonment. The themes that will be explored in the following sections relate to women's accounts of neglect, coercive control, physical abuse, sexual abuse and denial of reproductive rights in their marriages. The process of abandonment and the violence and deception it entailed as well as women's efforts to seek justice will also be explored.

#### Neglect As A Form Of Abuse

The narratives of women we interviewed were commonly structured through binary constructions of expectation and reality. In the context of an arranged marriage, popular cultural conceptions of romance in South Asia locate it immediately after the arrangement of a marriage, where romance is commonly conducted over phone or in more cosmopolitan contexts through controlled opportunities to meet and socialise. In more rural contexts, courtship is commonly conducted in the period following a rather short engagement (as no one - least of all the bride's family - wants a long engagement lest it is called off, bringing shame and stigma upon the bride and her family) or in the period immediately after the marriage as the couple get to know each other (Munck, 2009; Puri, 1999). Women narrated their expectations about romance, desire and longing following marriage, and in line with notions about independent living in the West, looked forward to

developing affective relations with their partner free from the constraints and scrutiny of a joint family.

Just under a fifth of the women discovered after the wedding that their husband had agreed to the marriage following pressure from his family. Consequently, the thwarting of their expectations and hopes from their marriage was a common refrain in women's accounts of suffering (Kallivayalil, 2010). Women recounted their bewilderment and self-blame when the marriage was not followed by any intimacy:

There were no (sexual) relations between us. I couldn't ask, even when I intensely wanted him, and I was sleeping by his side. And he knew (but) he never hugged me, never stopped me crying at midnight. In public, he behaved like an ideal husband. He would hug me, kiss me on my forehead, caress my hand but when we were alone, he would not even touch me (Hira, 32).<sup>3</sup>

Women, whose families had expended considerable sum of money on their marriage and for whom this marriage might have meant a family strategy for transnational mobility, perceived considerable pressure to make the marriage work and responded to this absence of emotional engagement in various ways. Some women tried to change their identities, alter their selves to become closer to the ideal partner they thought their husband would desire.

I started living according to him, he would complain about my dress, hairstyle, would ask me to change my very persona. I tried changing myself completely according to his wishes but he would still be unhappy. He wanted me to change and become like the girls in UK (Bina, 26).

Another participant recounted that her husband tried to enrol her in a gym so she could "shape up (her) body to his specifications". In some cases, it could be argued that neglect and rejection of the women stemmed from a mismatch between the family's conception of an ideal Indian daughter-in-law which was at odds with the men's expectations of a 'Westernised' performance of gender by their wife - a habitus (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66-67) that had classed, racialized and gendered

dimensions. For example, dexterous use of cutlery would be an upper class skill in the Indian context; women's use of their hands when eating – a common practice in India – was looked down upon by some men as simultaneously 'ganwaar' (ignorant/rural/lower class), 'uncivilised' (not Westernised), and 'dirty'. Such expectations also related to gendered and racialised scripts on appropriate clothing, appropriately feminine behavior in matters such as laughing (subdued) and talking (quietly) and bodily/pubic hair (femininity as absence of bodily hair). Charsley (2016) documents the boundary-making exclusionary discourses about difference and disgust in representations of new migrants that prevail among South Asian diasporas. She argues that these discourses reflect and simultaneously reinscribe the dynamics of cultural and social capital through manifestations of structures of socio-economic and symbolic power. We found that such discourses related to class and cultural habitus associated with rurality/urban modes of living as such experiences tended to be recounted by women from poorer families and more rural regions.

The expectation that a bride's pre-marital habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) will be recast upon marriage is normative in arranged marriages. A new bride is commonly expected to embrace the socio-cultural milieu of her husband's family, learn their language/dialect, learn to cook local food, give up her own dietary preferences and adapt local practices such as modes of dress. Such expectations can be particularly onerous in long-distance marriages, where Kaur (2012, p. 85) argues that women are effectively stripped of their 'social body' and expected to take on a completely new identity in which their old self has no part. Marriage migrants we interviewed found this enforced erasure of memory and personal and social histories associated with the recasting of their corporal and cognitive selves particularly repressive.

Some women recounted the burden of the expectation that they would use their sexual allure to draw their husbands away from their previous relationships that the family disapproved of. In line with previous research (Jaspal, 2014; Yip, 2004), women who were married to gay men reported that their in-laws viewed marriage as a 'cure' for their son's 'deviant' sexuality:

Soon after I came here, I realised that the marriage was a sham. He stayed away from home for days at a time. When I questioned him, he said, “You are nothing to me. I married you for my parents, your job is to look after them.” When I complained to his parents, they said it was up to me to make him want to stay at home (Bina, 26).

After the wedding ceremonies, two of the women found out that their husbands had long-standing mental health conditions and three women realised that their husbands were dependent on drugs. The men’s families had believed that the marriage would ‘cure’ them, with the corresponding burden on the women to change their husband’s behaviour/health condition through love. These women were subsequently blamed and subjected to abuse when this change did not happen.

Some women who migrated upon marriage, recounted how their husbands left them to fend for themselves in a country where the women did not understand the infrastructure of everyday life and could not speak the local language. Jaspreet, a middle class woman with an undergraduate degree found herself totally isolated when she migrated to join her husband who had a professional job in a city in Italy, where there was a very small Indian population:

After many months apart, when I hugged him at the airport, he didn't hug me back. He started reading a book on the train, on the way home. He had nothing to say to me. When I spoke to him, he would reply in monosyllables. So my time there was like, starvation, language problems... It was a constant struggle. Inside, I was suffering. And I would ask him, tell him, that I needed companionship, I need love, I need to talk to you. But there was nothing from him (Jaspreet, 29).

Women who faced such rejection recounted being bewildered and traumatised by this lack of engagement in a context where they had no one else to talk to, no other source of support. Women framed this behaviour as violence, as a violation of their expectation from a relationship, and as a transgression that served to control them, as it left them without adequate devices to socialise, to shop for and prepare meals for themselves (the husbands ate elsewhere), or to buy adequate clothes to keep warm.

## Coercive Control

All men and in many cases their relatives acted purposively and inventively to control and dominate women, and through a combination of surveillance, rule making and enforcement, effectively secured privileges and benefits from these relationships. The concept of coercive control (Stark, 2007) reframes domestic violence as a liberty crime, whereby physical, psychological and sexual violence is interwoven with a combination of ongoing tactics of control, intimidation and isolation that serve to create conditions of unfreedom. In line with previous research findings (Chaudhuri et al., 2014), women reported a range of purposeful strategies to exert control over them and to prevent them from disclosing the nature of the abuse and from seeking help. Similar experiences were recounted by women in all three states and across different social classes and castes.

My father had given me a mobile but they (in-laws) would hide the charger. My mother-in-law said "Once a girl is married she has to forget her parental family - who is going to pay the bill?" One day, when no one was at home, I saw my charger on the table. So, I tried to charge my mobile but found that they had removed the sim card. When my husband came home, and I asked him about it, he snatched the mobile, threw it forcefully on the floor and stomped on it, crushing it (Manju, 31).

Shiva, 29, who migrated to a country in East Africa following marriage, recounted how racialized constructions of Black people were utilised by her husband to cultivate fear and thereby hinder the development of affective connections with any potential sources of support. "We had a maid servant who was Black. He used to frighten me, saying, 'Be careful, stay away from these people - they will not think before killing you.' But my relations with her were very friendly." When Shiva attempted to counter her isolation by trying to socialise with her neighbours, he utilised racialised and gendered constructions of Black men's sexuality to undermine her reputation among her relatives: "He made phone calls to my relatives in India and told them that I roam around the entire village and keep sexual relations with the Black people".

One woman recounted how, after forcing her to consume alcohol, her husband made a call to her family and made her talk to them while she was inebriated; this proved to be an effective tool to humiliate her and to diminish her standing amongst her natal family. Moreover, it also made it more difficult for her to later convince them about the abuse she was facing, as they accepted his version of events – that she was to blame as she had taken to drinking excessively and was neglectful of his needs. A few women who migrated upon marriage reported being coerced to drink alcohol to conform to their husband’s ideal of a Westernised wife and recounted feelings of shame for defying gendered cultural norms about consuming alcohol.

### Physical Abuse

While all women were subjected to coercive control, about three quarters of our research participants – both women who had migrated following marriage and those who were left with their in-laws – also experienced physical violence. Fifteen women faced physical violence from their husbands only, 11 from their in-laws only, while 16 women were subjected to physical abuse from both their husband and his relatives.

His harassment escalated over the months. Eventually, I told him, "You get me a ticket for India and give me back my passport which you have hidden somewhere." He didn't want to hear such things from me, so he started beating me in the presence of our landlord. I was very frightened. I later went to his friend for help but he told me, "You can't go anywhere. You are staying here illegally, they (police) will put you in jail straightaway". I learnt that he had not brought me there as his wife but as a visitor. The time limit for my stay was over, so I was in deep trouble... When he came home, he beat me badly that night. He threatened me, "If I cut you into pieces and bury you, no one will know about it." Over the next few months the beatings continued, got worse. I knew that I was staying there illegally, so I didn't know what to do (Shiva, 29).

In line with findings from previous studies, we found that perpetrators exploited migrant women’s unfamiliarity with the sources of support in other countries, including lack of knowledge about

police. State immigration policies which restrict the rights of marriage migrants exacerbate the power imbalance in these relationships and become part of the matrix of control that sustains the abuse of women (Anitha, 2011, Menjivar & Salcido, 2002; Stewart, 2013). Where women lived with their in-laws in India, the social norms against divorce and gender norms which imply that married women have no place in their parent's home created a context where in-laws were able to subjugate the women and abuse them with impunity.

### Sexual Abuse By Husband And Other Male Relatives

Research indicates that an intimate partner is the most common perpetrator of rape (Walby & Allen, 2004). Women reported a continuum of sexual coercion (Kelly, 1988) whereby their husband determined sexual relations in the marriage, and decided when, where and how sex took place. Whether women migrated to join their husband or were left behind with their in-laws, men who were pressurised into marriages seemed to have negotiated with their family to continue their prior relationship so long as they could sustain a public performance of their arranged marriage to an Indian-origin bride selected by their family. Where the man's family resided in India, this performance required occasional visits to the family home where the wife was effectively abandoned with the in-laws. In all cases, the men seem to be able to determine the parameters of their performance, whilst expecting women to accept their secondary status to men's primary partner.

In the beginning, my husband hardly ever came home at night. He used to tell me that he had to work two to three shifts. Later, when he did come home, we used to be in the same room but he would be ... watching horror films. I used to get frightened by such films ...but he would pressurise me to watch and indulge in sexual acts as seen in the films. A few months later, when he went to parties, he would come back with his girlfriend. If I questioned him, he would just laugh it off. His parents never said anything to him about this. When I saw all this I was truly depressed (Asha, 38).

Some men's expectations from their partner included an uninhibited performance of sex (within gendered parameters) and expectations of an adventurous and experimentative sex life, which was at odds with women's socialization into sexually submissive/passive roles. Where women could not conform to these expectations, they were denigrated or coerced to meet their husband's expectations. Pragna Patel informed us that marriage migrants who approached SBS for help because of domestic violence commonly recounted such abuse.

Where men had been pressurised into the marriage by their parents and did not show any interest in pursuing a relationship with their wife, women were blamed by their in-laws for men's continuation of a prior relationship. In some such cases, women were also pressurised to become pregnant in the belief that this would change men's attitude towards them.

He never stayed at home – he was out most nights, and I thought, maybe he was with someone else. I refused to have any relations with him, but his parents wanted a grandchild. He complained to his mother, "She does not even allow me to touch her!" When my mother-in-law talked to me about it, I told her, "We haven't even spoken to each other properly yet. How can we have any relations with each other?"

Well educated and from a middle class family, Chandni had concomitant expectations of a companionate marriage (Donner, 2016; Fuller and Narasimhan, 2008), and refused to have any sexual relations with a man who did not hold any affection for her nor showed any interest in her as a person. Thereafter, Chandni recalled that the verbal abuse and control escalated:

One night when I came home from work, my mother-in-law gave me food and milk to drink. I don't know what happened, what was in it, but when I got up in the morning, I found bite marks on my shoulders, breast, neck, thighs and stomach. I had pain all over my body and in my stomach. I called out but no one was home. When I called up my husband, he told me that he had (sexual) relations with me (Chandni, 35).

Chandni - who was set to work in a factory the day after she arrived in the UK - eventually managed to call her parents through a colleague's mobile. She benefitted from the presence of a large South

Asian diaspora in the UK, as her parents managed to contact a friend who came and took her away. Unaware of the avenues to secure indefinite leave to remain in the UK on the basis of the domestic violence she had experienced, she returned to India. She has since tried to secure the return of her dowry and her wages without any success. Her husband refuses to come to India and take part in divorce proceedings, leaving her in a legal limbo. Chandni was one of the few women who felt that she had rebuilt her life and is now a head-teacher at a school. She dreams of adopting a baby girl and making her “as strong as me”, but is unable to, because of her liminal status as an abandoned woman.

Women left with in-laws were also vulnerable to sexual harassment from male relatives, as they were perceived to have lost the protection that derives from a husband’s claim to exclusive sexual access. Thirteen women recounted ongoing sexual harassment from their male in-laws – primarily the father-in-law. For one woman, who was left with her in-laws in Gujarat for several years while her husband returned to the US, the lack of support from her husband meant that she had to find other ways to deal with sexual harassment:

My father-in-law began coming to my room as I slept with my son to watch me sleeping. When he began to touch me, I would get up and get angry. Once, I even slapped him. When I told my husband about it he did not believe me. Instead, he threatened me. Then I told my mother-in-law, and she said, “Are you going to disgrace your god-like father-in-law?” ...My parents were not able to accommodate me. I had my own room at my in-laws’ place, so I found a way out - I started sleeping with my bedroom locked (Okhaben, 42).

When some women reported sexual abuse by in-laws to other family members or the husband, they were disbelieved and their disclosures were perceived as false allegations intended to break up the affinal family. This abuse and the lack of support by the husband served as a catalyst for some women’s decision to leave the marital home. Where sexual abuse was perpetrated by their husbands, a majority of the women did not feel able to disclose it to anyone – ‘not even to my

sister' was a common refrain. Most of these women indicated that the interview for this research was the first time they had spoken about this abuse.

### Denial Of Reproductive Rights

A third of the women were denied their reproductive rights: 11 women were coerced to undergo abortions and eight were pressurised to get pregnant. Consistent with previous research (Campbell et al., 2004; Jasinski, 2004), women reported that verbal and physical abuse escalated during pregnancy. There were other contexts in which men denied women their reproductive rights. Bhavi, who married at a later age than is normative in India, recounted that her presence was used as a foil for continuing her husband's same-sex relationship. When her pregnancy threatened him with the responsibility of fatherhood and she resisted the pressure to undergo an abortion, physical violence was used to achieve that end.

He used to stay in America for six months and the next six months he would come to India. While in India, he would take me to various hill stations but every time his partner – a man - was also with us. Once or twice, I saw them having sex. During that time, I became pregnant. I was very happy to learn that, but then he started beating me with stick and iron chain which led to a miscarriage (Bhavi, 50).

In another case, the husband and his family used this woman's lack of awareness of immigration rules to trick her into having an abortion:

He told me that I had to have an abortion, otherwise I would not get my visa for Australia. When I later went to the hospital to get my medical check-up for my visa, I saw many women who were pregnant and were going abroad. I questioned my mother-in-law, but she insisted that they must be going on a different visa (Rani, 28).

Though research universally associates pregnancy with the escalation of abuse, our study also indicates that such abuse escalated where women were pregnant with a girl child.

He was in the UK while I was in India with my in-laws. Whenever the beatings got too much, I would visit my parents for a few days. He came back for three months and I got pregnant. I tried

to forget all the unhappy incidents of the past. During the seventh month, he came to visit and we went to see the doctor. When we learnt that I would have a baby girl, he was very angry. After that, he started beating me under one pretext or the other - twice he tried to strangle me. The second time, I lost consciousness and fell down. When my parents came to enquire about a *Simant* ceremony (which celebrates a woman's first pregnancy), my sister-in-law said, "Why do we need to have that when it's a girl" (Raji, 30).

The preference for sons derives from cultural practices like dowry that create economic disincentives for having daughters. Analysing female 'deficit' in the sex ratios, Sen (1990) argues that this is a consequence of sex-selective abortions and the gender-biased allocation of resources leading to lower survival rates of girls in India. Sociological evidence also points to a continued preference for sons among some South Asian diasporas: for instance, the rituals that celebrate the birth and critical phases of a child's life are more elaborate and joyous for sons (Purewal, 2010). This context of son preference is the likely explanation for why a majority of abandoned women had daughters – only four of the 22 children were sons.

#### THE DECEPTION AND VIOLENCE OF ABANDONMENT

Despite continuing and often escalating forms of violence, most women initially sought to keep their marriage intact. They tried to placate their husband and in-laws through silence and avoidance behaviour as they tolerated everyday acts of control, and lived with what they deemed an 'acceptable level' of violence. Such conceptualisations served to normalise this violence and enable the women to stay married. Socio-cultural norms against divorce made it very difficult for women to leave abusive relationships. Consistent with previous research (Chaudhuri et al., 2014; Rao et al., 2000), we found that a majority of women eventually sought help clandestinely from multiple informal sources, including neighbours, domestic servants or any sympathetic relatives in their husband's family. Based on the common belief that domestic violence is a private matter, initial disclosures to neighbours and friends often led to a tacit condoning of the violence. Most women first involved their family in order to negotiate with the abusers to minimise the abuse or secure

guarantees of better treatment in order to enable the marriage to persist, while women left in India sought guarantees that their husband was intending to sponsor them on a spouse visa. This research confirms the findings of Chaudhuri et al. (2014) who characterise these strategies as efforts to bargain with patriarchal arrangements, which were, however, largely ineffective.

### The Process Of Abandonment

As the violence escalated, familial support in the form of a brief stay at the natal home to escape the violence, negotiation with the husband's family or a dowry payment to mitigate the violence was often forthcoming for those women in India. Initially this support was conditional upon the woman's efforts to 'make the marriage work' through compromise and 'adjustment', values women are often socialised into from an early age (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Panchanadeswaran & Koverola, 2005). Eventually, about a quarter of our research participants fled to their parents' home when the violence became unbearable.

Women who had migrated upon marriage to countries including the UK, Canada and the USA, were unaware of policies that entitle immigrant women who experience domestic violence to leave their abusive partners and apply for permanent residence and none contacted formal sources of support in their husband's countries of residence.<sup>4</sup> In the context of these policies, men seemed to purposefully utilise the more restrictive immigration regimes that operate across transnational borders to treat their wives as disposable women. As one woman reported:

He often used to hit me. After three years like this, we came to India for a holiday. ... After two to three days, he left me at my mother's place. We had return tickets - we were planning to go back together after two months. But he phoned me and said he was returning to the UK that very night and I should come back later. I was surprised, but I thought, he must have got some new project at work. We all went to the airport to see him off and he left. Later on, he suggested that I stay on to attend English classes so I could pass some exams that I was planning to take in the UK, so I extended my return ticket. It was only later that I realised that he was waiting for my

visa to expire. As soon as the deadline passed, he called to say he was going to divorce me (Hira, 32).

Of the 23 research participants who had migrated upon marriage, sixteen were taken back to India and abandoned and their visa revoked. Abandonment across transnational borders meant that women were unable to initiate any criminal or civil proceedings against the men, and nor were they able to avail the rights to settlement which they were entitled to in some countries. Seven women fled their husband's home to a relative in that country or came to India after an episode of violence and when they sought to negotiate their return, they realised that their husband had revoked their visa. A majority of women who were left with their in-laws while they waited for the sponsorship documents gradually realised that their husband and his family had no such plans for them:

They used to beat me almost daily...with a belt, hanger or whatever was at hand. After almost a month, my husband left for London. Before leaving he whispered to me, "Live according to mum's instructions - don't expect anything from me." I asked, "Won't you phone me?" he did not reply, he did not even say bye to me while leaving for London. Then there was no phone call, no letter. My so-called husband just disappeared. And back in his house, I was under strict watch. Except for cleaning the compound, I was not allowed to go outside, there was no phone.

It was as if I was in a jail (Manju, 31).

The period between the marriage and the abandonment varied vastly, with three women being abandoned within two weeks of the wedding following appropriation of their dowry, while a few women remained with their in-laws for up to eight years before being cast out or leaving because of the violence. A majority of the marriages lasted between two to three years.

#### The Consequences Of Abandonment

Men and their families were able to dominate, abuse and exploit women, secure in the knowledge that the women would not be protected by the legal frameworks in India and across transnational spaces (Bhattacharjee, 2013; Lodhia, 2010). Lack of awareness about the laws in an alien country acted to the detriment of the abandoned women, as their husbands utilised the legal system of the

foreign country to their own advantage. In India, divorce requires the presence and participation of both parties to the marriage in court proceedings. Where the husbands initiated ex-parte divorce proceedings, a majority of the women did not know that this was happening; some received the notification but did not understand the meaning of the documents sent to them; and those who did, lacked the resources to represent themselves in court proceedings in another country. In some cases, women remained unaware that they had been divorced even after the completion of the process in their husband's country. Given that court cases in India take years to resolve, women could not comprehend a legal process (such as that in England & Wales) which can take a matter of weeks, is largely resolved by way of paperwork, and can proceed and indeed conclude without the wife having ever responded.

After they realized that they had been abandoned, most women and their families first turned to community organisations such as the village *panchayat* (local self-government institutions) for reconciliatory measures. When these overtures failed, they went to the police, while those who had the knowledge and the financial means (also) approached lawyers and/or political and women's organisations who could advocate on their behalf. In a context where divorce carries significant social stigma and once married, women are no longer considered to have a place in their parents' home, in most cases women initially sought to utilise the criminal justice processes to negotiate with their husband to reconcile, and failing that, to recover dowry items, seek monetary recompense for wedding costs and for maintenance for themselves and their children. Criminal proceedings were the last resort for most women. The police too commonly perceived mediation as their role. One police officer from an NRI cell in Punjab told us:

It is not the duty of the police to arrange a compromise. But we do counselling in NRI cells<sup>6</sup> and attempt to keep the family intact, resolve misunderstandings, so that the marriage can be saved. If the man's family does not respond and we find that there have been dowry demands and physical or mental torture to the woman, then ... a case may be filed.

Where women had been thrown out of their in-laws' home, even some lawyers working on abandoned women's cases perceived restoration of the relationship as the ideal solution, as this lawyer working in a small town in Punjab reported: "In my personal opinion, I would say that somehow the girl should be rehabilitated into her in-laws' family, and get settled there."

In a discussion about the social constraints which shape women and their family's expectations from the police, this senior police officer from Punjab reflected on their practice:

Although the police are not supposed to mediate, they are compelled to mediate. Justice delayed is justice denied. You cannot make a woman appear in endless proceedings, the legal processes are slow, and it is difficult for a woman from a village to travel to a city court - there are frequent adjournments. She won't travel alone, she will be accompanied by a family member and the costs are high. ... If you compare it to the West, the role of the police is very different. But we have to understand it in this context.

However, a senior lawyer who specialises in abandoned women's cases argued that the mediation in police stations is a deeply flawed process: "The police are not sensitized or equipped to handle mediation. I don't think you can find effective mediation through police, but if done under the guidance of courts through the mediation cells, it could work."

Despite the constraints they faced, just under half the women we interviewed had managed to get the police to register a case – an unusually high figure that reflects the role of the police in facilitating our access to women. Women from more affluent families in Delhi and Punjab, with its network of NRI Cells,<sup>5</sup> found it easier to navigate the criminal justice system. Nisha, who possessed an Engineering degree and worked in the corporate sector in a metropolis got married to an NRI from Hong Kong, through a matrimonial advertisement in newspapers. After she was brought back to India through deception and abandoned there, she pressed criminal charges of cruelty against her husband and his family through a Crime Against Women Cell and also filed a complaint with the National Commission for Women which sent a consulate summon to him. At the time we interviewed her, her divorce proceedings were ongoing. For women from lower caste, poorer

families with little social capital, securing justice proved to be an uphill struggle, not for want of effort on their part. When Satnam, a lower caste woman from a poor farming family, heard that her husband had come to India to marry for the third time, she reported his whereabouts to the police. The police were slow to act, and he managed to return to the UK with his bride. Another woman recounted how she managed to get the police to arrest her husband when he came to India, but he bribed them and fled the country in the middle of the night.

Despite their active efforts to secure justice, few women found a satisfactory resolution as the police would not register a case, could not follow up on a case because the husband was domiciled abroad and in some cases did not pursue the case adequately. Some women perceived this apathy and lack of assistance as a 'second level of violence'. Our interviews with various service providers alerted us to the legal and extra-legal strategies that are available to abandoned women, as well as the lacunae within the institutional structures that perpetuate injustice against women. We also formed an understanding of some of the underlying ideas and assumptions that inhibit effective and decisive official responses to this violence, in particular, the ways in which ideological accounts of social problems perpetuate injustice and inequalities in practice.

About a quarter of the women we interviewed had been or were currently engaged in civil proceedings, most of them for several years. Men's residence in another country, their family's relatively better financial resources, and the long-drawn nature of the legal processes were some of the barriers women encountered. Most of the women we interviewed were still trying to get some compensation that would enable them to secure their future, while others had given up all hope after expending considerable time and their meagre financial resources. None of the women managed to secure regular maintenance for themselves or their child(ren) or an equitable financial settlement, while only a few secured the return of some of their dowry.

The impact of abandonment also created contexts for further forms of violence against women due to the stigma associated with divorce and women's insecure status within natal families. Abandoned women were left financially dependent on their families, were often blamed for the end

of their marriages, reported a loss of relationships with extended family and friends, a detrimental impact on the social standing of their family, difficulty in securing employment and the loss of good marriage prospects of younger sisters. The loss of dowry upon abandonment and having to return to their parental home placed some women in a precarious position as a potential threat to the inheritance of their brothers.<sup>6</sup> Where there had been no formal divorce proceedings, women were left in a legal limbo and lacked the option of securing their future by marrying again. The stigma associated with abandonment made it difficult for some women to undertake paid work, particularly in the smaller towns and rural areas.

#### CONCEPTUALISING TRANSNATIONAL ABANDONMENT AS A FORM OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Conceptualising abuse and abandonment in transnational marriages requires us to understand how, in a globalised world, gender intersects with other axes of disadvantages including class, nationality and immigration status. While examining how and why gender relations are ordered and negotiated across transnational contexts, how gender organises relations between spouses and families, as well as how gendered agency operates or is constrained within these spaces, we have found Mahler and Pessar's (2001, p. 445) conceptualisation of 'gendered geographies of power' useful. The concept has helped us in particular to understand how gender operates simultaneously on multiple spatial and social scales (eg. the body, the family, the state) across transnational terrains. It is both within the context of particular scales, as well as between them and among them, that gender ideologies and relations are reaffirmed and the subordinate locations of women reinforced in cases of transnational marriage abandonment.

We also draw upon Wright's (2006) concept of 'disposable women' to draw attention to the structural preconditions of women's vulnerable location in such marriages and upon abandonment. Wright explores the dynamics through which value - and its dialectical counterpart, waste - are generated and circulate through global flows of capital and power making the embodied third world disposable woman. We draw upon Wright's analytical approach that unpacks the dynamics that

make women's laboring body a site of exploitation and accumulation and extend this analysis to the woman in transnational marriages, in order to explore how the myth of the disposable third world woman is remade within and across scales—the body, the family, the state, and across the transnational spaces.

In the West, abandonment within the context of marriage is generally not considered a form of violence against women. However, in the case of transnational marriages of women from South Asia, we find that abandonment is embedded within a pattern of domestic violence and coercive control exercised over the woman. Additionally, by strategically abandoning their wives in their home country and then filing for divorce in foreign courts, transnationally mobile South Asian migrant men make it almost impossible for their wives to secure justice. These actions deprive women of their financial rights such as an equitable settlement upon divorce, maintenance for their children and recovery of dowry. This research shows that beyond the various processes of control and individual acts of harm that lead to and outlast the act of abandonment in transnational marriages, abandonment itself constitutes a form of violence against women. It is rooted in and results in gendered devaluation of women and is enabled by “gender-blind” transnational formal-legal frameworks, which construct abandoned women as subordinate citizens who can be abused, exploited and disposed of, with impunity. This research examines abandonment as a distinct sociological-legal category, which dismantles the myth of flexible citizenship in transnational migration and simultaneously locates abandonment in an experiential matrix, framed in a graded/differentiated diaspora, and the formal-legal frameworks within and between nations, which determine the figuration of the gendered citizen as a social/cultural/political category.

Such a conceptualisation of violence against women is increasingly under attack from gender-neutral framing of violence in intimate spaces. The discourse of gender symmetry is one that has been utilised and is increasingly alluded to in policy debates in the UK on coercive marriages of men. About a fifth of our participants recounted men's disinterest in and disengagement from the

marriage, and attributed this to the pressure from men's family to marry. It is useful to unpack some of the issues this raises in greater depth here.

Research indicates the continuum of coercion, pressure and social expectation that accompanies the forced marriage of women (Anitha & Gill, 2009), and that such coercive pressures can overwhelm men. Statistics from the UK indicate that about 18% of the cases reported to the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) in 2013 and 2014 (out of a total of 1302 and 1485 respectively) were about men (FMU, undated). Men's experiences of coercive marriages remain underdocumented, though there are indications that this coercion is more likely to entail emotional and social rather than physical violence (Samad, 2010, p. 201). Coercive marriages of men take place in the context of the family's desire for an Indian daughter-in-law to secure family's links to their ancestral country, to reinforce their belongingness within their diaspora community and to ensure the reproduction of a traditional culture, which women are assumed to facilitate (Samad, 2010; Gangoli et al., 2006). Coercion of men also takes place in the context of the rejection by their family of what is deemed an unsuitable partner (Samad, 2010). For gay and bisexual men, socio-cultural expectations of heteronormativity may be particularly coercive in some communities (Hester et al., 2012), such that men may acquiescence to a marriage to hide what may be considered a deviant sexuality (Jaspal, 2014; Yip, 2004).

The harm caused by coercive marriages of men may include physical violence, but far more common is the emotional and psychological abuse by elders to sustain the coercive marriage, often resulting in stress and depression due to their inability to publicly acknowledge their primary relationships, and from the performance of heterosexuality in the case of gay and bisexual men (Samad, 2010). There is a growing recognition that gendered perceptions about men's capability to repel abuse as well as hegemonic constructions of masculinity may make it harder for men to articulate vulnerability or to seek help for fear of loss of face (Hester et al., 2012; Samad, 2010). In the case of gay, bisexual and minoritised men, gender, sexuality and constructs of race may intersect to create simultaneous subject positions that locate them within subordinated constructs

of masculinity based on their race and sexuality, but in positions of privilege in relation to female partners.

However, we would argue that the harms experienced by men in coercive marriages are nonetheless qualitatively different from the harms suffered by women coerced into marriages, which include domestic violence, forced pregnancy or abortion and coercive sex to 'correct' lesbian women (Hester et al., 2012, p. 29) underpinned by a regime of coercive control exercised by the husband and often the wider family. This differentiation between men and women's experience of forced marriage does not simply rely on a 'calculus of harm' that defines domestic violence as an incident-specific crime judged by injury or trauma – saying that the more severe and frequent the incidents of violence, the more serious the abuse (Stark, 2007, p. 1510). These differences are on account of gender as well as sexuality, whereby in a patriarchal and heteronormative world, the harm from forced marriage is experienced differently by lesbians, gay men, heterosexual women and heterosexual men, as Dauvergne and Milbank (2010) effectively unpack in their analysis of gender and sexuality within refugee law.

Stark (2007) argues that the unrelenting nature of coercive control undermines the physical and psychological integrity of the victim, thereby creating conditions whereby women experience a narrowing of life and options, of agentic capacity and action. Working with Kelly et al.'s (2014, p. 12) conceptualisation of the impact of coercive control as the shrinking of the 'space for action', the narratives of women who experienced marriage to reluctant men indicate that men's spaces did not seem to contract on account of their marriage. Indeed, these spaces expanded as they secured a range of benefits from their marriage whilst continuing their earlier relationships (Also see Yip, 2004, p. 345). While men might have felt pressurised to enter into and continue an unwanted marriage, most men seemed to be able to secure varying degrees of agency to enjoy leisure, freedom and control within (and outside) such marriages, whilst it was women who found their legitimate expectations from a relationship thwarted, their liberty constrained and were subjected to a range of significant and ongoing harms. Where men are pressurised into the marriage by their family,

there exist avenues such as divorce or nullity for them; but women have little recourse for the deception, abuse and the financial and social consequences of abandonment.

Our findings make a unique contribution to the debates on particular forms of violence against women. There are several local and transnational contexts that explain the abuse, exploitation and abandonment of wives. The inequalities within the institution of marriage are exacerbated by the geopolitical inequalities between nations, whereby the groom's family is able to command greater resources, mobility, knowledge of state institutions and legal mechanisms. In the majority of cases documented in our research, men colluded with their families to derive benefits from such a marriage. The findings suggest that cultural practices and dominant social norms which make for patriarchal control and devaluation of women including son preference played an important role in the violence and abandonment in transnational marriages. More crucially, it is the inadequacies of national and transnational legal mechanisms that serve to construct transnational brides as a particularly vulnerable and disposable category of women.

Addressing the issues arising from this research will require a range of mechanisms at local, national and transnational arenas. Foremost is the recognition of abandonment as a form of domestic violence. When applying for spouse visas, women should be given information about their rights in case of domestic violence. Other recommendations include extending settlement rights that are available in many countries to migrant women experiencing domestic violence to those women who have been taken back to their home countries and abandoned. Where women seek to engage in family, civil or criminal proceedings in their husbands' country of residence, they should be given visas to enable them to do so. Countries with diasporic populations from India need to consider reciprocal arrangements for the enforcement of legal decisions concerning divorce, maintenance, residency and contact with children. Awareness-raising and strengthening women's organisations and specialist service provision in India and in countries with large Indian diasporic communities will help support victims of abandonment in their quest for justice. However, it is only by addressing the very structures that enhance women's vulnerabilities that a

lasting solution can be found. We urgently need better protection of women's human rights within and across national boundaries, not only to hold perpetrators to account, but more significantly, to dismantle the structures within which some men perceive transnational wives as disposable women.

## Endnotes

1. A Non-Resident Indian (NRI) is a citizen of India who holds an Indian passport and has temporarily emigrated to another country. However, in popular parlance, NRI denotes any person of Indian origin who lives in another country, which is how this term is used here, reflecting the voices of the women and the practitioners interviewed for this study.
2. Southall Black Sisters (SBS) is a UK-based women's organisation which provides services for black and minority ethnic women and campaigns to end violence against women and girls.
3. Names have been changed to protect women's identities and a pseudonym allocated to each woman in accordance with regional and religion-specific naming conventions.
4. There are indeed many women who do manage to contact such sources of support (Anitha, 2011). It is likely that these women are among those more able to secure permanent residence in those countries – the point of this research was to reach women who were unable to benefit from such support and had been abandoned in India.
5. NRI cells (also known as NRI & Women's Wing) are part of a dedicated Unit in the Punjab Police which was established in 2004 to deal with issues relating to NRIs – primarily property disputes and transnational abandonment of wives. There are 15 such Cells in Punjab.
6. Dowry is widely regarded as a form of pre-mortem inheritance for women where women have few inheritance rights in practice. A loss of dowry has particular financial implications for women. In the context of existing formal legal rights to inherit, brothers did not always welcome their sisters back to the natal home, viewing them as a threat (Patel, et. al., 2016).

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**Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents and categorisation of abuse**

	Number of women	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
18-24	6	11%
25-34	30	53%
35-44	18	32%
45-54	3	5%
<b>Religion</b>		
Hindu	36	63%
Sikh	19	33%
Muslim	1	2%
Christian	1	2%
<b>Highest educational qualification</b>		
Primary school (till 10 years)	4	8%
Middle school (11-16 years)	3	5%
Secondary school (17-18)	8	14%
Undergraduate university degree	30	53%
Postgraduate university degree	9	16%
Did not disclose	3	5%
<b>Employment status</b>		
Full-time work	14	25%
Part-time work	7	12%
In education	4	7%
Unemployed	31	54%
Did not disclose	1	2%

**Number of children**

None	38	67%
One to two	19	33%

**Domestic abuse**

## Financial abuse

Dowry demanded/given to in-laws	57	100%
Dowry related violence/harassment	39	68%
Appropriation of wages	7	14%
Abuse related to domestic labour	56	98%

## Physical abuse

Violence from husband only	15	26%
Violence from in-laws only	11	19%
Violence from both	16	28%
Denial of food and medicine	27	47%

## Psychological abuse

Verbal abuse	53	93%
Coercive control/intimidation	57	100%
Isolation	56	98%

## Sexual abuse/denial of reproductive rights

Sexual abuse from husband only	18	32%
Sexual abuse from in-laws only	13	23%
Forced abortion	11	19%

**Post abandonment actions**

Reported to police	53	93%
Recovered dowry	3	5%
Obtained financial compensation	4	7%

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