

Ep 46: Forced marriage and the importance of RSE

<https://www.secularism.org.uk/podcast/2021/03/ep46>

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I think taking away education from your child massively limits their

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autonomy in adulthood. That's forcing your child to marry somebody. You know,

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that again ties them into the community as an adult and takes away their autonomy.

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Emma Park (EP). Despite being a criminal offence, forced marriage is still a problem within certain

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religious communities in Britain. According to the UK Government, forced marriage MAY involve

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physical violence but does not have to. It can also include emotional and psychological pressure.

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It is the psychological type of forced marriage that has concerned my first guest on this podcast,

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Eve Sacks (ES). Eve is a board member of Nahamu, an organization which aims

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to counter religious extremism within Britain's

Jewish population. In February this year Nahamu

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published a position paper co-authored by Eve

and her colleague, Yehudis Fletcher on arranged

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and forced marriages within ultra-orthodox Haredi

communities. The paper examined the harm that it

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can cause young women and men to be pressured into marrying without their full consent.

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One of the main ways of tackling forced marriage,

as the NSS and other organisations have argued,

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is through education - in particular relationships

in sex education or RSE. In the second part of

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this podcast I will be joined by Megan Manson,

Head of Policy and Research at the NSS to discuss

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what needs to be done in order to ensure that all children in Britain have access to RSE.

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We also look at the barriers in the law to the objective teaching of RSE in faith schools,

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and the impact which the narrow world view of some faith schools can have upon their students'

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ability to grow into fully autonomous adults. But first let's talk about forced marriage itself.

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(EP):

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Eve Sacks. Hello. (ES): Hello. (EP): Let's start with a basic question of definition: how do Haredi

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Jews relate to other Jews. If we look on the continuum from orthodox and maybe isolated from

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society, to liberal and fully integrated, where would you put them? (ES): So if we're looking

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at the Ultra Orthodox community, which we prefer to call the Haredi community, which is the term

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that they use themselves. This is just part of the community that are quite fundamentalist in their

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religious beliefs. So unlike modern orthodox Jews

or liberal or progressive or traditional Jews,

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they generally live in quite insular communities

and they generally have their own schools,

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their own communities, and they often don't have a lot of contact with those outside their

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communities. And obviously some do work, you

know, in wider society but some work within

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the community so their entire life and their entire life experiences for some people could

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be within that community. (EP): How far do they

speak English? (ES): So this varies; so for the

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women they speak English very well. You know the

schools follow most of the national curriculum or

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the bits of the national curriculum that they are

happy with, and the girls will sit multiple GCSEs,

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so the girls' English is completely fluent. In parts of that community there will be boys who

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attend the unregistered schools and the boys in that part of the Haredi community (and so not

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the whole heritage community in what we call the Hasidic part of the Haredi community) and

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the boys' English could be quite limited even if they've lived in the UK their whole lives. (EP):

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How large a proportion of the Jewish population in Britain are the Haredi Jews? (ES): So

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I'm not sure of exact numbers. We're talking about 10 - 15 % of the population. But they've got quite

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a high birth rate so when you're looking at percentage of Jewish births it'll be much

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higher than that 10 - 15% if you're looking at the overall demographics. (EP): And just for our

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listeners' interest, where would you put yourself on the continuum from orthodox to liberal? So

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I'm a member of mainstream Orthodox Synagogue and I'm observant of the sabbath laws. I keep kosher.

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So somewhere in the middle I guess. (EP): Let's talk then about arranged marriages within the

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Haredi community. How does the process work because it's quite a distinctive process. (ES):

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The way it works will depend exactly on the type of Haredi community but broadly the parents will

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go to the matchmaker. They'll discuss the sort of person they're looking to find for their

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son or daughter and the matchmaker will see who's on their books. I guess like a sort

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of dating agency in many ways and will start fixing them up on introductions. And with the

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young person who is looking to get married, after the meeting depending on the community either the

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couple will just discuss themselves if they want to meet again. In some communities they'll go back

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via their parents or the matchmaker but where they whether they want to meet again. (EP):

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How much of a say then do the bride and groom have in choosing their spouse? (ES): Right so

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this really very much depends on which part of the Haredi community we're talking about. So

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you know as we've discussed and the reason you invited me on this podcast is

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we wrote a position paper on forced marriage and what we are concerned about is a situation where

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the bride and groom have got very little say indeed over who they get married to. Now that's

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certainly not the case in all parts of the Haredi community. In some parts of the Haredi community

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it functions much more like a matchmaking process, functions much more like a sort of traditional

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matchmaker that a secular person might use if you think imagine match.com or something like that.

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But in some parts, particularly the more insular parts of the Haredi community, like for example

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the types of Haredi community where the boys are attending unregistered schools,

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you could then have a situation in some parts of the community where the young

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people getting married have really got very little say indeed. And that's what we're concerned about.

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And I think, you know, when we're saying that by definition all forced marriages are arranged but

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not all arranged marriages are forced. So we were looking at what would make an arranged marriage

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a forced marriage. And that broadly comes down to whether the bride and groom have got any say over

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the process and whether it would be easy for them, you know once they've been introduced to somebody

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to say: 'Actually this is just not the right person', or: 'I'm not ready yet, I want to wait',

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or: 'Actually I just want to meet somebody in another way'. And when none of these things are

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possible, you know you're beginning to tip
into
what might look like a forced marriage. (EP):

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What are the pressures on young Haredi
people
to get married to someone, even if they

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have hardly met them before their marriage
or
don't necessarily like them? (ES): It's
probably

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best to pick that up into the first question
which
is what the pressure is to get married in
general

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right? Yes, so you know you're living in a
community where young women are brought
up,

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even though the girls have got very good
education
up to GCSEs, there's pressure to have
children.

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And these are sort of general pressures that
really start from infancy. So you know
this

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is why the forced marriage we're talking
about
is actually quite hard to identify because you

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know when I say or when one says 'forced
marriage'
you sort of imagine somebody being shipped
off to

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another country, you know perhaps after
having
their passports stolen, you know perhaps
there

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being some element of physical force. But
that's
not what we're talking about at all. We're
talking

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about socially conditioned forced marriage
and
that's a situation where you bring somebody
up in

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an insular community and they just don't see
any
other options or any other ways to meet
somebody

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and there's the expectation to marry young.
So
you know we've seen in the Ofsted reports
of

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romantic literature being redacted. So you
know one of the reasons for that, even if it's

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non-explicit, you know just sort of very
innocent
romantic literature being redacted, is because
you

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know that promotes the idea of marrying for
love
and romance. (EP): So basically, their
autonomy,

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their ability to make their own decision is simply conditioned away so they don't know what they're

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missing? (ES): Yes to the point that for a lot of them that they'll tell you this is exactly what

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I want. You know and it's like, you know, if you bring somebody up from infancy without having

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that autonomy - for many, a bit like Stockholm syndrome, for many though they will just sort

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of be happily go along with that. And even girls who, let's say, do very well in their GCSEs, and

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you know they go to the doctor and think: 'Oh I might quite like to be a doctor',

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you know they'll be given lots of messages so: 'It's not a good career for you', 'A lot of time

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in the university, you won't graduate till you're really old, who will marry you then?'. You know so

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even if they sort of got excellent GCSEs and sort of you know obviously everybody's come across a

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doctor and think that might be a good career, (but) they won't necessarily have the autonomy

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to be able to decide to do that. (EP): What's the average age for these arranged marriages

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in the Haredi community? (ES): Between 18 - 20 years old. (EP): And that's the same for both

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boys and girls? (ES): Yeah in some parts of the Haredi community,

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boys are getting married slightly older but you know in terms of this, and I think that's what's

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interesting with this because people tend to think of forced marriage being a sort of woman's issue,

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I know obviously once the couple are married the power dynamics and the relationship are

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different for the man from the women but you know in terms of these marriages it's absolutely equal

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you know - boys and girls either just before or just on reaching adulthood. (EP):

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How far is the concept of consent a part of the Jewish conception of marriage? (ES): Right so

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Jewish law requires consent so it requires you know the bride to basically have to agree to have

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the literally to have the ring put on their finger as part of the marriage ceremony. There would be

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absolutely not a valid Jewish wedding if she was in some way like held down and the ring was put on

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her finger without her agreeing to it. However the line that you would draw of what consent is within

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Jewish Law doesn't necessarily match up to the way we see consent now in terms of society generally.

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And you could take a step back and say: 'Well what do we mean by a full and free consent?'

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So for example if you're marrying somebody you've only met once and you know nothing about them you

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don't know whether they're going to be a loving husband, or whether they're going to be an abuser

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in the worst scenario, or just if they've got serious mental health issues you can't cope with,

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or perhaps they're gay, I don't know whatever it is, you know the woman as part of that marriage

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ceremony is consenting by Jewish Law because she's holding out her hand for the ring to go on

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her finger. But is she legally giving a full and free consent when she doesn't really know anything

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about her future husband? (EP): You mentioned that some romantic novels were say redacted. On

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the topic of education how far do Haredi boys and girls receive relationships and sex education in

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schools? (ES): So this is something that we've been lobbying on. Look relationship and sex

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education is really important for everybody and I would argue and I have argued before and I will

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continue to argue that Haredi children need sex education and relationship education more

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than any other children in the country for various reasons. Unfortunately even though the government

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has made massive progress in introducing universal sex and relationship education,

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although I think it's just coming in September now (I think there was a delay because of Covid)

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and Haredi schools have not necessarily been agreeing to teach that. Now you know, we can

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talk through the different reasons why these children need the education but one of the reasons

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of course is because of the early prevalence of forced marriage, and also because of the

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lack of understanding of what full free consent is both to a marriage but also of relationships

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in physical relationships inside a marriage as well. There are other reasons why these children

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need this education. For example, we've heard of people who have an LGBTQ identity but get married

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without even realising or understanding that

part of relationship and sex education would help

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the children in Haredi schools, who have this identity, understand and come to terms

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with what that might mean in terms of future relationships. Also like all communities there

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are sexual predators and keeping girls and boys completely naive to these risks is a big problem

0:11:48.160,0:11:53.680
because that puts them at risk of them being groomed by a predator. (EP): : Let's talk about

0:11:53.680,0:11:58.480
the effects of the forced marriage and the men and women involved. Now you mentioned the problems of

0:11:58.480,0:12:06.640
people who might turn out to be lesbian or gay or LGBTQ in general. How far is being different

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from the heterosexual identification, how far is that tolerated within the Haredi community. What

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do you do if you it turns out that you're gay or lesbian? (ES): I think there's a problem because

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you know obviously if you identify your identity and manage to sort of not to get married and sort

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of live quietly single or leave the community you know that's less but much less of a problem than

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if you find yourself in one of these marriages and basically, particularly if you're a lesbian woman,

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find yourself being subject to ongoing marital rape. It might not be that the woman saying:

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'No don't do this', in terms of every time they're engaging in sex, but if she's uncomfortable with

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it and just doesn't feel that she can say no or doesn't have the tools to say no or perhaps you

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know they just sort of discuss it and she's told you're married to me this is what you have to do,

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the Haredi community hasn't really found a great space for people who are born into their community

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who do turn out to be gay other than to say they should leave. And you know if they leave

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that's great but the problem is the people who end up getting married first and then you have

0:13:08.480,0:13:13.680

all sorts of issues in terms of what happens with children. (EP): What would you say are

0:13:13.680,0:13:20.640

the biggest negative effects of forced marriage on the men and women involved? (ES): So look

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I obviously have a slightly biased viewpoint, because the people coming to me are coming to me

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basically because they're not happy because why else would you reach out to an activist who's so

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vocal if you're happy? Right? So I'm absolutely prepared to admit that for a lot of people you

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know they have this forced arranged marriage and actually they're happy and it's all fine and they

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live out their lives you know that their parents have made a good choice for them and that's fine

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so the people who are reaching out to me are already not happy for some reason.

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So there's various reasons. And so a couple of the people recently who reached out

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were both men who had decided they didn't actually want to be Haredi at all. They wanted to

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basically live as secular Jews and they sort of reached out to me to ask what to do now,

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they just want to be secular, they don't want to be religious at all. But they were still, the one

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man in particular, he was still pressurised into the marriage because his younger sister

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was getting married and there was a tradition in the family of getting marriage in age order

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and he realised, he you know he'd grown up in in the UK but he didn't have any secular education

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at all, you know, so he just realised, you know, I helped him go to the cinema and go to a nightclub

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and meet some young people. But I think as part of that he just realised how difficult it was going

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to be because he had had his opportunities taken

away from him. So that's one category of people

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of those who don't want to be Haredi anymore.

A lot of the women who come to us have ended up

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with violent partners and there's been domestic abuse and marital rape. (EP): Could you give us

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some examples, I mean without going into too much of the traumatic details. (ES): Women who are not

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attracted to their husbands who don't want to have regular sex with them and are subject to sexual

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violence or women whose husbands have got quite serious mental health issues that they didn't know

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and struggle to deal with it and (the husbands) have ended up being violent perhaps because the

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mental health issues are not under control. (EP): What about in terms of bringing up children,

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can it be difficult for people in forced marriages

to bring up children together? (ES): So one of the

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challenges we are seeing as well is that you know

when somebody decides that they're going to leave,

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and particularly and when the other spouse is very devout in their views, you then get issues

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over schooling. So for example there's somebody that I was speaking to quite recently who's just,

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you know, she's got a son who she just desperately wants him to get into the regular Jewish school

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so he can do or any regular school so he can do GCSEs and A levels but you know that's ended up

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going to court because her ex-husband wants him to stay in a Haredi school where the education is

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extremely limited indeed and so people who leave have all sorts of additional challenges. (EP):

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Is it the case that in a Haredi marriage the man has any control over the woman in terms of what

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she does with her career, what she does with money, the number of children she has? (ES):

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Well, look I think a lot of these things are not necessarily controlled by the husband but are

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controlled by communal expectations so I don't think it's so simple. So look some things will

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be able to be resolved within a marriage and there may well be, there's likely to be an expectation

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that the man will take responsibility for certain things. You know, so we've heard one woman came

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to us to say that she thought that getting married would be her route to be able to drive,

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because her parents have always said: 'Well if your husband lets you drive after you get married

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then it won't be up to us anymore', but I think some of these things just end up being you know

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on the agenda of the community at large rather than on the agenda of the particular husband.

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And it would be very difficult for a woman whose husband says you know: 'I insist that you

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wear this particular type of hair covering', or: 'I won't let you drive', or whatever it is

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and the woman may not feel she has a voice but part of this will also come from her parents,

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his parents and in the community at large. So I wouldn't want to pin the whole thing on the

0:17:08.800,0:17:14.320

dynamics within a relationship. (EP): So basically if you're a woman in the Haredi community, in your

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marriage you have a lot of pressures on you to conform to the expectations of others and

0:17:19.040,0:17:23.200

you have relatively little autonomy to live your life as you want? (ES): Broadly yes,

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and obviously having many and multiple children close together will add to those challenges and

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take away from autonomy. (EP): So talking about the divorce, so how far has 'get',

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the refusal of the 'get', the religious Jewish divorce which a man grants to a woman, how far

0:17:40.240,0:17:46.160

has this been a problem in Haredi marriages? (ES):

It is a problem but I think what's a wider problem

0:17:46.160,0:17:49.680

is more if you take a step back from that before you even get the point that the man

0:17:49.680,0:17:55.920

doesn't want to give the get, is that you know if the couple experiences domestic difficulties,

0:17:55.920,0:18:01.040

they're likely to be told by the community leaders that they should try again and we've heard from

0:18:01.040,0:18:05.920

one particular woman who told us that her husband had been violent and notwithstanding all of that

0:18:05.920,0:18:10.320

you know as a victim of domestic violence she was told he's your husband and you have to stay with

0:18:10.320,0:18:14.560

him. When your whole support network network is telling you that you have to stay with him

0:18:14.560,0:18:19.600

that's already a challenge. Interestingly what we've seen happening is when women have left and

0:18:19.600,0:18:23.760

they've decided they don't necessarily want to be particularly observant anymore, in some ways

0:18:23.760,0:18:28.000
the religious divorce might be more interesting to the man who wants to marry again within that

0:18:28.000,0:18:32.800
community and needs her to accept it than for the woman. Because if she leaves and decides

0:18:32.800,0:18:37.440
to be totally secular she may just decide that actually she'll be happy with the civil divorce.

0:18:37.440,0:18:42.960
But you know in most cases the woman does need the religious divorce. But unlike let's say in

0:18:43.600,0:18:47.840
Muslim religious marriages the men really can in most cases only have one wife

0:18:47.840,0:18:53.200
which means if he wants to get married again HE will need to give that divorce. There is an issue

0:18:53.200,0:18:58.000
with get refusal but I think the numbers in the UK are less than 20. And there's new legislation

0:18:58.000,0:19:03.520
around coercive control. I mean it is an issue but it doesn't only affect the Haredi community.

0:19:04.160,0:19:08.800
And it's not the biggest problem, I don't think.
(EP): For you what is fundamentally the biggest

0:19:08.800,0:19:12.880
problem? (ES): The fundamental problem for me I think is the lack of autonomy.

0:19:13.760,0:19:18.720
So you know I don't really have any problem at all with somebody who wants to be a religious

0:19:18.720,0:19:26.240
fundamentalist and lead their life in an insular way. As long as they chose to do that as an adult

0:19:26.240,0:19:31.360
because we should have autonomy in how we lead our adult lives and that they give autonomy to their

0:19:31.360,0:19:35.680
children if they don't want to do that either. So that's why I lobby on the schools because I think

0:19:35.680,0:19:41.360
taking away education from your child massively limits their autonomy and adulthood. That's why

0:19:41.360,0:19:45.680
we' campaign on forced marriage because forcing your child to marry somebody

0:19:45.680,0:19:51.120
you know that again ties them into the community as an adult and takes away their autonomy.

0:19:51.120,0:19:56.000
So for me it's all really about autonomy because we should all leave our lives and you know,

0:19:56.000,0:20:00.720
as long as we're following UK law, we should all lead our lives the way that you know we see

0:20:00.720,0:20:06.320
fit. And if you see it fit to lead your life in an insular community that's your call. But when you

0:20:06.320,0:20:11.120
start taking away other people's autonomy because of that, I see that as a big problem. (EP):

0:20:11.120,0:20:16.240
Some politicians or commentators who aren't Haredi or perhaps not even Jewish might say that

0:20:16.240,0:20:22.400
these arranged marriages and you know the faith-based education are a cultural norm and it's

0:20:22.400,0:20:27.520
no business of English law to interfere and your colleague Yehudis Fletcher, the founder of Nahamu,

0:20:27.520,0:20:33.200
has argued that this discourse of cultural norms can sometimes be used to dismiss the problems and

0:20:33.200,0:20:38.960
pressures that people in the Haredi community may face in an arranged marriage. In your view where

0:20:38.960,0:20:43.120
should the line be drawn between the problems

that should be dealt with by the laws of the land

0:20:43.120,0:20:48.080
and those that should be tackled within the Haredi community? Where is the principle of secularism

0:20:48.080,0:20:52.960
and the separation of religion from the State fit in here? (ES): That's a very good question.

0:20:52.960,0:20:59.760
So look I think the starting point has to be that you know lots of the laws are there for reasons.

0:20:59.760,0:21:04.640
So if you start with the education as an example, you know, we shouldn't be letting anybody off

0:21:04.640,0:21:11.600
educating their children because of their faith background. That's a human right to education

0:21:11.600,0:21:15.680
and to deny their education, that would be looking at cultural norms saying all these

0:21:15.680,0:21:21.360
children aren't entitled to education is highly problematic. I think you know the same with them

0:21:22.160,0:21:27.520
let's say not following up on cases of abuse or predators because of cultural norms is

0:21:27.520,0:21:33.280
highly problematic. And I think even with forced marriage I think again the government might be a

0:21:33.280,0:21:37.440
bit uncomfortable with this but you've got to just sort of take a step back and say: 'Well actually

0:21:37.440,0:21:41.600
the laws in the UK have been put in for reasons and if something is an infringement

0:21:42.160,0:21:45.600
of what's a forced marriage according to legislation then that's the point at which

0:21:47.040,0:21:50.320
you need to take action, even if that makes you uncomfortable. And even if that

0:21:50.880,0:21:54.480
goes against what the cultural norms of that group are. Because I like to think

0:21:54.480,0:21:59.680
that we have a secular government and when the law, The Forced Marriage Law from 2014,

0:21:59.680,0:22:06.400
if that says that all threats and pressures of someone into marriage is a criminal offence,

0:22:07.120,0:22:11.920
that's where we draw the line. If the Government takes an even firmer stance at some point in the

0:22:11.920,0:22:16.480
future they'll presumably put the energy and the consultation into making sure that that's the

0:22:16.480,0:22:23.040
right way to go at that point. You know norms do change over time I think. (EP): Presumably I mean

0:22:23.040,0:22:27.920
from what you've said in fact some of the people in the Haredi community, those who have to go

0:22:27.920,0:22:32.560
through forced marriages may have cultural norms but the cultural norms are not benefiting them,

0:22:32.560,0:22:36.480
they're harming them. (ES): Yes so look I mean I think there's a mix I think there's

0:22:36.480,0:22:40.320
a mix here because some people will actually have these forced marriages and be very happy

0:22:40.320,0:22:44.240
and not even ever reflect that they were a forced marriage. For some people

0:22:44.240,0:22:48.320
they will have gone into it with really good intention, they'll have been a sort of model

0:22:48.320,0:22:51.680
student you know, they'll have wanted to marry the person their parents suggested,

0:22:51.680,0:22:56.960
But when it comes to the nitty-gritty of being married to somebody long-term and it turns out

0:22:56.960,0:23:01.360
that the person's not exactly what they bargained for at that point only then will they reflect

0:23:01.360,0:23:06.160
that it was in fact a forced marriage and they had no part of the decision making. See I think

0:23:06.160,0:23:13.760
the Government does need to not let cultural norms shadow their judgment. But at the same

0:23:13.760,0:23:18.560
time when laws are put in place there should be consultation processes and that is what happens

0:23:18.560,0:23:23.520
to make sure that everything's considered. (EP):
So if we're thinking about the best way for

0:23:23.520,0:23:27.920
British society as a whole to help tackle problems like arranged marriage

0:23:27.920,0:23:33.280
that occur within closed faith communities your response to that would be - open consultation,

0:23:34.080,0:23:38.800
talking legislation trying to find a way forward together. (ES): Yeah and I do think with this,

0:23:39.600,0:23:45.280
I don't have any issue with arranged marriages. I think ironically more and more people now turn to

0:23:45.280,0:23:49.200
arranged marriages because you know if you want to look at something like match.com it is a form

0:23:49.200,0:23:53.680
of an arranged marriage. I don't have any issue with an arranged marriage as long as it's done

0:23:54.320,0:23:59.680
with a full autonomy of both the people getting married, you know as long as they

0:23:59.680,0:24:03.760
control the process. I think that's absolutely fine. We're not saying there shouldn't be any

0:24:03.760,0:24:08.000
arranged marriage because that's a ridiculous suggestion we're just saying that if there is

0:24:08.000,0:24:13.120
arranged marriage you need to think more carefully about where the fine line is between what makes

0:24:14.320,0:24:17.280
something an arranged marriage, where they're introduced to suitable people that they can

0:24:17.280,0:24:22.640
either decide to or not to get married to with however much time they need to make that decision

0:24:22.640,0:24:29.280
and with no stigma, versus a situation where they don't have any control or choice over

0:24:29.280,0:24:34.000
what's happening. So one of the things that we did when we wrote the paper is we decided that we set

0:24:34.000,0:24:38.400
out what we call markers of forced marriage. And we did this because we wanted to sort of

0:24:38.400,0:24:44.240
make it clear what it was we were actually talking

about. For example this idea that you would only

0:24:44.240,0:24:48.320

be allowed to meet the person for a very very short length of time before having a decision.

0:24:48.880,0:24:52.240

That would be happening in a forced marriage.

An arranged marriage you would obviously have

0:24:52.240,0:24:56.560

as much time for as long as you want. (EP):
And what are the other main markers? (ES):
Yes,

0:24:56.560,0:25:00.160

we set out five markers although I'm sure you could come up with more and this is just based

0:25:00.160,0:25:02.800

on what we saw in the Jewish community. I'm sure in different faith communities

0:25:02.800,0:25:07.520

you would come up with different markers. So the things that we wanted to talk about was

0:25:07.520,0:25:13.600

first of all the young person not really having a control over the timing or the process. So the

0:25:13.600,0:25:17.040

young person not being able to say: 'Well actually I'd rather just meet somebody through dating'

0:25:17.040,0:25:19.920

or it could be that there's a sibling getting married and there's a pressure to get married

0:25:20.560,0:25:25.760

within a family and you know the first point is just the first marker and was just no control of

0:25:25.760,0:25:31.440

the young person over entering into the arranged process. The second thing was basically about

0:25:32.720,0:25:36.960

very rushed engagement so only being able to meet one or two or three times

0:25:38.320,0:25:44.000

and in some extreme cases it might only be once or twice and we've even heard of people who had

0:25:44.000,0:25:48.080

this first meeting in their parents' house and the engagement food was already laid out on the table

0:25:48.080,0:25:52.560

even before that first meeting took place. Obviously that would be an extreme situation but

0:25:52.560,0:25:57.200

we're talking about rush decision-making, you know not meeting as long as you would need to let you

0:25:57.200,0:26:02.080

really understand who you're getting married to. And the third thing that we were talking about

0:26:02.080,0:26:07.600

is that once there's the engagements happening,

not being allowed to freely communicate after

0:26:07.600,0:26:11.520

that. So whether that's not being allowed to meet or not being allowed to even speak on the phone

0:26:11.520,0:26:17.760

or by text message so once the engagement's been agreed no further possibility to get to know the

0:26:17.760,0:26:23.760

person before the day of the wedding. (EP): So basically things which prevent them from really

0:26:23.760,0:26:27.920

having this ability to consent fully because they don't actually know what they're getting

0:26:27.920,0:26:34.560

into. (ES): Exactly. And the fourth thing that we spoke about is an engagement contract. So this is

0:26:34.560,0:26:39.280

basically a contract which is binding under Jewish law which is basically between the two

0:26:39.280,0:26:44.800

fathers or the two sets of parents which is agreeing to take their children to the wedding

0:26:44.800,0:26:51.280

at a future set date. The contract could be broken but there's stigma to breaking it and the

0:26:51.280,0:26:55.520

young people are told the stigma of breaking engagements are worse than getting divorced for

0:26:55.520,0:27:01.520

example. So there's sort of emotional religious type spiritual pressure over once this engagement

0:27:01.520,0:27:06.000

contracts being signed and that contract is often signed within a week of that first meeting and

0:27:06.000,0:27:10.240

they've not got to know each other. If you imagine the timeline here: the parents have decided the

0:27:10.240,0:27:16.880

timing of the introduction; the persons have met maybe once or twice; they've got engaged;

0:27:16.880,0:27:21.520

and now they're engagement party is a week later and now this contract's been signed where the

0:27:21.520,0:27:25.760

parents have now made this binding commitment with possibly with financial or spiritual

0:27:25.760,0:27:31.440

penalties and excommunication perhaps penalties that they're going to get married at this future

0:27:31.440,0:27:35.600

set dates that puts a huge amount of emotional psychological pressure on the young person,

0:27:36.480,0:27:41.520
And then the fifth thing that we spoke about is just this expectation of marrying the person that

0:27:41.520,0:27:45.920
they're introduced to. So this for me I think is the key one. So if you just imagine you're

0:27:45.920,0:27:50.160
meeting somebody on match.com. If you meet them and they're not right you just say 'no'

0:27:50.160,0:27:54.880
and you know that signal to that person won't affect any future matches or how you're seen.

0:27:54.880,0:27:58.960
But you know, what if you meet one person and you say 'no' and then you're seen as being fussy and

0:27:58.960,0:28:03.760
the future matches become less good? So you just sort of intuitively know that the best match

0:28:03.760,0:28:07.920
will be the first one and that's the one you're expected to marry, to get married to, so this is

0:28:07.920,0:28:13.680
just expectation of marrying that person you're introduced to I think is the most problematic

0:28:13.680,0:28:17.840
one. And that's one that comes you know we mentioned before about the social conditioning

0:28:17.840,0:28:21.920
so bringing young people up in a community where they're socially conditioned that they will marry

0:28:21.920,0:28:27.120
the person their parents introduced them to. (EP): Finally what is the best way for our society

0:28:27.120,0:28:32.240
as a whole to help tackle problems like arranged marriage that occur within closed communities like

0:28:32.240,0:28:38.000
the Haredim? (ES): So I think, taking a step back in this it's really important to listen

0:28:38.000,0:28:41.680
to the people from that community. So I'm very aware you know although I'm Jewish I'm not from

0:28:41.680,0:28:46.960
the Haredi community and I really really listen to people who are coming out of that community

0:28:46.960,0:28:52.560
and telling me where they think the problems are. And I think you know for me the biggest problem

0:28:52.560,0:28:58.000
at the root of all of this at the moment are the unregistered schools. (EP): So basically

0:28:58.000,0:29:04.320
education is at the root of solving these problems. (ES): Yes absolutely. Education and

0:29:04.320,0:29:10.240
it's not just the relationship and sex
education
although that is critically important. It's just

0:29:10.240,0:29:15.600
basic secular education, whatever you think
about
GCSEs and A levels, the way it works at the
moment

0:29:15.600,0:29:21.040
in the UK is that it your route to autonomy is
to
have these qualifications that will then
enable

0:29:21.680,0:29:27.400
university or career access. (EP): Eve Sacks,
thank you very much. (ES): Thank you. (EP):

0:29:32.800,0:29:37.920
I'm joined now by Megan Manson (MM) Head
of Policy
and Research at the NSS. Megan, hello. (MM):
Hi

0:29:37.920,0:29:44.320
there. (EP): I thought Eve Sacks made some
really
interesting points there about the problems

0:29:44.320,0:29:49.840
faced by people in the Haredi community and
the
difficulties they face with actually trying to

0:29:50.720,0:29:54.320
be able to be in a position of
making an autonomous choice.

0:29:54.880,0:30:01.040
Megan this all really stems doesn't it from a
most recently a position paper which the
Nahamu

0:30:01.760,0:30:06.320
organisation published on forced marriage

on the 8th of February this year.

0:30:07.120,0:30:10.560
How did this position paper really
bring forced marriage to light?

0:30:12.800,0:30:17.200
(MM): Yes, well first I think Nahamu should
be congratulated on this paper. I think it's

0:30:17.200,0:30:22.960
excellent. It really does I think challenge
the stereotypes that we might have about
forced

0:30:22.960,0:30:29.280
marriages. So when we sort of think about
forced
marriage we might assume that they are
forced by

0:30:29.280,0:30:36.640
threats of violence or by sending the bride
away
and taking her passport as Eve mentioned
and

0:30:36.640,0:30:43.840
that it's something that maybe is more
commonly
associated with Asian communities and that
women

0:30:43.840,0:30:50.320
are usually the victims. Now while that's
certainly true in many cases this paper
showed

0:30:50.880,0:30:57.120
a very different perspective: that in the
Jewish
communities it's generally not, marriage is

0:30:57.120,0:31:03.840
not forced through threats of violence but by
a
lack of education combined with social
pressure.

0:31:04.560,0:31:11.120

And that the victims are very often male. That men in Jewish communities often have an

0:31:11.120,0:31:17.440

even worse education than the girls do so they are also in a position where they can't really

0:31:17.440,0:31:22.960

consent to marriage without really knowing what that means and without being able to sort of say

0:31:22.960,0:31:29.040

no if they're unhappy with it. So it is a really good paper for sort of expanding our understanding

0:31:29.040,0:31:33.680

of what forced marriage means and I think it's really forced people to think about this a bit

0:31:33.680,0:31:40.480

more carefully. (EP): How far is the Government able to act or not able to act in the supervision

0:31:40.480,0:31:47.200

of Haredi or ultra- Orthodox schools? (MM): Well this is interesting. I think that there's

0:31:47.200,0:31:53.200

certainly a gap here. The Department for Education is well aware of the insular nature of Haredi

0:31:53.200,0:32:00.000

schools and it sometimes does act on them so I've certainly read some Ofsted reports where Haredi

0:32:00.000,0:32:06.160

schools have been penalised for having quite a narrow curriculum or for censoring material.

0:32:06.160,0:32:11.200

Certainly I've seen that come up but I don't think the Department of Education goes far enough.

0:32:11.760,0:32:18.480

There have been cases where even state-funded schools in the Haredi community have basically

0:32:18.480,0:32:26.800

be given a green light to enforce rules that will really withhold information from their

0:32:26.800,0:32:31.760

pupils. (EP): What sort of information are we talking about here? (MM): Well so if I can give

0:32:31.760,0:32:39.040

an example; this is just from February. There's a school in Salford, Beis Yaakov Jewish High School.

0:32:39.600,0:32:46.480

It's an all girls school and it's been state funded since 2005. So it's, I think it's a

0:32:46.480,0:32:54.080

voluntary aided school. The Office of the School's Adjudicator or the OSA is a part of the Department

0:32:54.080,0:32:58.240

of Education which decides whether or not schools are complying with the schools' admissions code.

0:32:59.280,0:33:06.960

So all schools basically have a a code that parents have to follow if they want priority entry

0:33:06.960,0:33:13.280
into faith schools for example. So if it's a faith school it'll basically they'll say well which

0:33:13.280,0:33:19.440
pupils can be prioritized so for example with Catholic schools it tends to be baptised Catholics

0:33:19.440,0:33:27.600
who are prioritised. So the OSA in February took a look at the admissions code of Beis Yaakov

0:33:28.320,0:33:33.200
and it found certain points where there were lots of problems with the admissions code,

0:33:33.920,0:33:40.480
lots of technical problems. But what was really interesting are the parts that the OSA didn't have

0:33:40.480,0:33:46.240
a problem with or even seem to sort of say they were acceptable. So for example this particular

0:33:46.240,0:33:56.640
school places extreme restrictions on the private lives of pupils and their families. So for example

0:33:56.640,0:34:01.920
the admissions arrangement said that families had to strictly limit their children's access

0:34:01.920,0:34:08.000
to all forms of communication including cinema,

theatre and written material. And in one example

0:34:08.000,0:34:13.120
it said the requirement that school-aged children do not watch television was, and

0:34:13.120,0:34:17.760
it gave this example as this being an acceptable thing to put in admissions code because it was

0:34:17.760,0:34:22.000
objective. You could objectively measure whether or not school-age children do or do not watch

0:34:22.000,0:34:28.960
TV but it seems to miss the point that this is a really unreasonable thing to to impose on families

0:34:29.840,0:34:33.760
and that this restricts children's access to information. I mean you know it means that

0:34:33.760,0:34:38.400
they can't watch the news, they can't know what's going on in the wider world or even

0:34:38.400,0:34:42.960
in the country they live in. (EP): And going back to Eve Sacks' point about autonomy, I mean

0:34:42.960,0:34:48.080
that really would restrict their ability to be autonomous individuals because they simply,

0:34:48.080,0:34:52.880
they're being cut off from so much information about what's happening in the society they live

0:34:52.880,0:34:57.520
in. (MM): Yeah absolutely absolutely I mean this and the wider society you know in Britain um you

0:34:57.520,0:35:01.200
know they're completely cut off from that. And the other thing as well about the same school

0:35:02.000,0:35:07.520
(I think it's quite relevant here to talk about this) is that it imposed a dress code. So this

0:35:07.520,0:35:13.680
is an all-girls school and imposed a dress code on pupils and their mothers which was

0:35:13.680,0:35:20.640
quite frankly sexist and unreasonable. (EP): It's very intrusive to require the parents to behave

0:35:20.640,0:35:24.960
in a certain way or wear certain clothes. (MM): Well yes this is all about sort of proving your

0:35:24.960,0:35:30.320
religiosity. It's about saying well you know but we are a true Haredis so therefore we deserve a

0:35:30.320,0:35:34.560
place at this school. And so for example said that mothers must cover their hair at all times

0:35:35.200,0:35:41.040
and that the girls should wear tights at all times and it should be apparent that they are being worn

0:35:41.040,0:35:46.480
so no long skirts for example that would hide the fact that you're not wearing tights. I mean these

0:35:46.480,0:35:50.960
are you know these are ridiculously intrusive as you said and they're frankly sexist. They're

0:35:50.960,0:35:59.040
sexist standards that are only applied to women. (EP): Another powerful point made by Eve Sacks is

0:35:59.040,0:36:06.320
that one way in which autonomy can be hindered is if there is no comprehensive well-balanced

0:36:06.320,0:36:14.240
teaching of relationships and sex education at these schools. What are the barriers at the moment

0:36:14.240,0:36:21.040
to ensuring that all children even at faith schools get comprehensive RSE? (MM): Well

0:36:21.040,0:36:27.360
hopefully some of the barriers are going to be removed when the sort of compulsory RSE is

0:36:27.360,0:36:33.040
rolled out in September. Hw this is going to go in the Haredi schools I'm not sure.

0:36:33.760,0:36:39.840
But even with this there are some big issues. So

one issue is that the, according to the Government

0:36:39.840,0:36:46.240
guidance faith schools can teach RSE according to

the tenets of their faith which you know you can

0:36:46.240,0:36:51.600
see is going to have a whole host of problems and we did explore those problems in a report

0:36:51.600,0:36:58.480
and it's called 'Unsafe sex education' which we published in 2018 and we found in our research

0:36:59.440,0:37:06.960
that there are a lot of state-funded schools teaching that all contraception is morally wrong

0:37:06.960,0:37:10.240
apart from the rhythm method which I'd hardly count as contraception because it doesn't

0:37:10.800,0:37:17.760
work very well. And abortion is wrong, masturbation is wrong and of course sex outside of

0:37:17.760,0:37:23.200
heterosexual marriage is wrong. So, and I think I found one or two schools saying that homosexuality

0:37:23.200,0:37:30.160
is 'disordered'. (EP): What justification is there for the Government to say that faith schools may

0:37:30.160,0:37:37.280
teach RSE in accordance with the tenets of their faith? Why this subject in particular? (MM):

0:37:37.280,0:37:42.880
Well I think it's because religions have a huge

stake in sort of controlling the sex lives of

0:37:42.880,0:37:48.000
their congregants and they have a lot to say about what they think makes a relationship

0:37:48.000,0:37:52.720
according to that religion. And this is the dilemma: if you're going to have faith schools,

0:37:53.440,0:37:58.080
you have to sort of let them teach their religion otherwise what's the point of faith schools.

0:37:58.080,0:38:03.600
So I can see why the Government is kind of forced to let them do that because otherwise well it

0:38:03.600,0:38:08.160
ceases to be a faith school isn't it? If it can't teach what it thinks about relationships and sex

0:38:08.160,0:38:13.840
education then you know it ceases to be a faith school so that's kind of why they have to do it.

0:38:14.720,0:38:21.840
(EP): It's the question that even if they teach their views the question is perhaps whether they

0:38:21.840,0:38:28.080
should also be required to teach other views with which they disagree. (MM): Yeah and I'm sure that

0:38:28.080,0:38:32.240
many faith schools do that. I'm sure that many faith schools teach that you know there are other

0:38:32.240,0:38:38.960
views but the problem is if you're a Catholic school for example I won't, I wouldn't say it's

0:38:38.960,0:38:43.120
possible to teach that objectively because you know if you're a Catholic school you already have

0:38:44.640,0:38:50.480
an expectation that the children there are you know are being raised Catholic and that

0:38:50.480,0:38:56.240
you know it says 'Well we are a Catholic school, you are therefore Catholics because you come here,

0:38:56.240,0:39:02.880
and as a Catholic school this is what we expect'. So Catholics think that same-sex relationships are

0:39:02.880,0:39:08.560
wrong, we are a Catholic school, ergo we think same-sex relationships are wrong therefore if

0:39:08.560,0:39:12.960
you're a child at this school we implicitly think that you'd be doing something wrong

0:39:13.680,0:39:19.520
if you turn out to be gay. (MM): What is the in your view is the solution to this issue,

0:39:19.520,0:39:24.880
what needs to be done to improve the supervision of faith schools and in general to ensure

0:39:24.880,0:39:30.000

that children are given the education they need to make a fully autonomous decision about what

0:39:30.000,0:39:35.760
to do with their lives including their sexuality? (MM): Well first I think there do need to be some

0:39:35.760,0:39:41.280
greater powers for the DfE to intervene on school rules that are not in the people's interest.

0:39:41.280,0:39:45.120
So you know I thought it was very telling that the Office of the Schools' Adjudicator couldn't really

0:39:45.120,0:39:51.920
do anything about these ridiculous school rules that were clearly, you know if you're saying that

0:39:51.920,0:39:58.480
children can't watch TV, I mean that's clearly not in the interest of the child. So I think

0:39:58.480,0:40:03.360
they should be able to have the power to say - hang on a second this is really unreasonable - so

0:40:03.360,0:40:08.960
it's strange that they don't already have that power. Secondly I'd say that you know mandatory

0:40:08.960,0:40:14.080
RSE really does need to be mandatory and that means that there's no religious opt-outs.

0:40:15.200,0:40:21.120

You know you have to teach it in an objective way, an inclusive way, in a way that doesn't

0:40:22.000,0:40:28.000

stigmatise LGBT children for example and that doesn't sort of stigmatise the idea

0:40:28.000,0:40:32.400

that contraception and taking control over your own reproduction is a bad thing. (EP):

0:40:32.400,0:40:38.400

And presumably doesn't also stigmatise the idea that you might have sex before marriage or might

0:40:38.400,0:40:42.480

try out different partners I mean because one thing that really struck me with the Haredi

0:40:42.480,0:40:47.360

system was that you have one partner and that's it. (MM) Yeah so I mean there are,

0:40:47.360,0:40:52.800

obviously there are children at all schools who have very different family set-ups and no child

0:40:52.800,0:40:56.080

should feel that there's something wrong with the particular set-up they're in because it isn't

0:40:56.800,0:41:00.800

one mum and one dad, it's something else or that their parents have been divorced and remarried

0:41:01.360,0:41:04.960

or anything else. No child should feel there's something wrong with their family.

0:41:05.760,0:41:10.080

The other one is that I'll reiterate Eve Sacks' point: she said the number one thing is getting

0:41:10.080,0:41:14.480

rid of unregistered schools which I completely agree with that, and unregistered schools are

0:41:14.480,0:41:19.520

a big problem not just when it comes to forced marriage but in general unregistered

0:41:19.520,0:41:24.480

schools are subjecting children to awful conditions, they're leaving them with

0:41:25.680,0:41:31.120

very little meaningful education and they're putting their you know their welfare at risk.

0:41:31.120,0:41:35.920

So absolutely you know the NSS supports any effort to tackle unregistered schools and make sure there

0:41:35.920,0:41:42.160

are no more and also to regulate home schooling so that can't be exploited as a loophole. And what

0:41:42.160,0:41:48.080

we find is that home schooling can be used as a loophole where the parents are saying

0:41:48.080,0:41:52.320

well our child is home schooled but what's actually happening is the child's been sent

0:41:52.320,0:41:58.160

to an unregistered school so that's a loophole that needs to be closed. (EP): Megan Manson thank

0:41:58.160,0:42:05.680

you very much. (MM): Thank you. (EP): This episode was produced by the National Secular Society,

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0:42:10.000,0:42:15.360

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