

MODERN SLAVERY TODAY

The slave trade continues to be one of the most profitable illegal trades in the world, second only to the illegal drugs trade. An estimated **45 MILLION PEOPLE** are currently enslaved according to the Global Slavery Index. Below are three stories from survivors* of human trafficking and slavery, each showcasing the deeply rooted and alarmingly common ways in which men, women and children alike can find themselves trapped in bondage.

**All names have been changed. All testimonies sourced by Making Herstory (April–June 2018)*



STORY 1: 'AYISHA', SOLD AND TRAFFICKED AT THE AGE OF 14, BANGLADESH

“When I was four, my mum died. I went to live with my Auntie and Uncle after my dad remarried quickly and moved to London, leaving me behind. After I turned 13, my father died in London after suffering with cancer. Several months later, the British embassy in Bangladesh told me he had secured a British passport for me and my sister before he died. I appealed to my family to help me get to London so that with my dad’s gift, I could go to school and college and maybe get to know my stepmother.

My grandfather, who I hadn’t seen since I was 4, suddenly turned up, and decided to take me to lots of beautiful places to visit in Bangladesh – places as an orphan I had never been taken to before. I later realised it was so he could get me to trust him enough to do what he was about to do next.

After a month or two, he said he was taking me to Dhaka on an exciting trip. So I went with him – I was only 14 at the time, and so excited. I had never been to Dhaka before. But when we got there, things changed rapidly. Instead of going to the zoo, I was taken to the airport and told to board the plane, because if I didn’t, he would leave me in Dhaka without money or food.

I was so terrified that I did as I was told and boarded the plane. My grandfather told me not to cry or whimper so I bit my tongue and squeezed my eyes shut. I was so scared as I had never been on a plane and had no idea where I was going. That journey is one I will never forget – it felt like hell. I wanted to scream and cry to the stewardesses and the people sitting in front of me or behind me that my grandfather was taking me away from my home, but he kept his hand tightly clasped on my arm the whole time, and only let it go when I needed to go to the bathroom. I had wanted to come to London so bad – but not in this way, not without my sister.

When we landed in Heathrow, my grandfather took me to the arrival gates where a man was waiting. The man gave my grandfather an envelope, promising that there was £10,000 inside it, and that he would treat me nicely until I turned 18 when I could legally be married off to his brother – who needed to marry someone with a British passport. They were laughing and joking whilst saying all this – as if my life was something they owned, that they could do whatever they liked with.

My grandfather told me to be a good girl, to not bring shame on the family and to go with the man. I didn’t want to and started to cry and shake and then suddenly I became limp. Now I know it was the shock of it all. The man carried me to his car. That was the last I ever saw of my grandfather. He

tracked me down a few years ago when he was on his deathbed to ask for my forgiveness. I told him I would never forgive him and that he deserved God's punishment for what he did to me.

In my first months of captivity, I was taken to a town far away from London. I wasn't treated badly but was told I had to work in the house and couldn't go to school or speak to anyone. Sometime later, I was bought to a flat in Tower Hamlets to visit someone who wanted to 'see' me and check whether or not I would be suitable for marriage sooner than my age would allow. I was never allowed to go anywhere on my own except the bathroom.

That flat proved to be my escape route. As soon as we got to it I said I needed the bathroom. I managed to pull myself out of the small window located next to the toilet cistern, and luckily for me, not only did the window lead straight out onto a balcony, but there was no one outside to see me. As soon as I got up, I ran up and up and up the stairs. I didn't run down because I was so scared someone would see me from the windows of the flat and come after me. I banged on the first door I found, and when it opened I was so relieved – because not only was it a woman who opened the door, but she was Bengali too. That woman became my saviour, my replacement family, and with the help of a local charity, helped me retrieve my passport and my freedom.

The fact that I was sold into a forced marriage for my British passport by my own family, still haunts and angers me. And I know there are lots of other girls out there who aren't as lucky as me – who have been sold just like I was but couldn't escape, and had to marry the men that bought them. Our communities know it goes on. Which means our mosques know too. So why don't they ever speak of it. Why don't they work to stop it?"



STORY 2: 'MELANIE' FROM THE PHILIPPINES, HELD CAPTIVE AND RAPED BY HER 'EMPLOYERS' IN KENSINGTON, LONDON

"My employers brought me to London from Qatar in February 2017. My English was very bad and because I wanted to make them happy so that I could support my family back home, I did whatever they wanted me to. In Qatar, after they said they wanted to employ me, they said I needed to come to London with them for a month, and then I would be sent back to work in the family house in Qatar like usual.

So I agreed. My husband works in Mecca most of the year to help with children's costs and pay for their education, but he was struggling which is why I had to work too. When I told him that this new family wanted me to come to London for a few weeks, he told me to go and to ask for a salary or to stay longer so I could earn in pounds. But I didn't want to stay longer – my children were only 4 and 7. They needed me and it was cheaper and easier to get home from Qatar.

So I agreed to come. The family was made up of 4 men and 2 women. The women were not leaving Qatar but the men couldn't look after themselves which is why they wanted me. When we got to the airport, the older brother told me to give him my passport to make things easy at the gates. So I did. Then he told me he needed to change the SIM card on my phone so it would work properly. So I gave him my phone. I didn't know I would never see them again.

When we got to London, we went to a big house. The family were very rich and the house was very nice. On the first day I was happy. I cleaned and cooked like I usually did, and thought on my time

off I would see some of London and buy some presents for my children. But then in the evening, when I asked for my phone and passport and when I would be paid my wages, I was slapped in the face and told not to ask again. I had never been hit before, and was in shock. Some Arab men used to shout and scream at me in my old jobs, but none of them had ever hit me.

When I realised what had happened I said I wanted to go home straight away. But they said I could not go anywhere because I was an illegal immigrant. It was then I realised why they wanted my passport and phone. There were no phones in the house – the family only ever had mobile phones – so I couldn't even call anyone for help.

I was forced to stay in that house for nine months, and whenever they left the house, the men would lock me in a store cupboard with onions and vegetables. Even now I hate the smell of onions. After the first slap, the men began to beat me more regularly and especially if anything I did displeased them. One day, I tried to cook a dish they had ordered me to make but I didn't know how. And because they didn't like it, two of the men smashed the plates at my feet making me bleed. That was also the night that I was...first attacked [raped].

Without any phone or my passport and not knowing any English, I didn't know how to escape. But one day, all the men had left to go somewhere, and I realised they hadn't locked the store cupboard properly. When I got out, I ran out into the streets and screamed for the police. Some people came and helped me and took me to a police station. But because I didn't have papers and didn't know English, I had to wait for a translator. The translator then contacted a charity who helped women like me, and now I am waiting so that I can go home and see my children. My mum and husband don't know what happened to me. I am too ashamed."



STORY 3: 'IZAD' FROM PAKISTAN, HELD OVER FAMILY DEBT BONDAGE BY 'EMPLOYERS' IN WALES

"My family back home is poor, but things became worse when my father borrowed money to pay off a debt. The men he borrowed the money from began to come to my house and threaten him and my mum with beatings if he didn't pay them, and every day that went by, they would add more and more interest to the borrowing.

One day, they came to my father and said they would burn the house down if he didn't give them something for their money. We believed them because they were powerful and could get away with it.

My dad said he didn't have anything, but one of the men looked at me and my mum. I had just turned 16. He said I could work off the debt if I agreed to do as he said for seven months, or that he would take my mother.

My dad agreed for them to take me, so the next day, the men came and took me away. One of them said that his brother-in-law in London needed cheap labour for his businesses, so he sent me and two other men who also owed money to the gang to Islamabad, where we were put on planes with false passports. We couldn't say or do anything or go to the police, because we were told our families would be hurt. There was one man who came with us on the plane, and he kept watching us in case we did anything. Before we reached the border gates, the man told us what to say – that

we were coming for a wedding. If we ended up in jail, no-one would help us and we would be left behind.

I ended up spending two years working 20 hours a day before the police raided the restaurant I was working and sleeping in. By that time, even though I was 18, I had gotten so used to being hit around the head and eating very little, that I weighed less than I did at 13.

Every day in the restaurants I worked in, I would see people with their families, eating nice food and going home to their houses. Sometimes I could hear the adhan and wished I could go to a mosque and pray. It made me miss my mum and dad and my home, and eating proper food. But there was nothing I could do. I had no telephone, no passport, no papers. And I was never allowed to touch or have money. I slept in a room with sometimes 7 men, sometimes 12. We were allowed to wash once every two days to look nice in the restaurant, and could only go out if one of the big men was with us.

After the police came, I was taken to a centre where I met the people helping me now. They helped me contact my family who are safe but if I ever get to go home again, I will make them move. One of the men I stayed with at the restaurant was trapped for six years. He was only meant to come for two months. He had been beaten every time he asked if the debt had been paid and when he could go home again. I dream of going home and being with my family and being free again. Nobody deserves to be like this, and I think more people need to know about this evil.”

CRIMES IN THE COMMUNITY

FORCED MARRIAGES

A forced marriage is forbidden and void in Islam. A large number of women and girls continue to be 'shipped in' from poorer overseas towns and cities to be sold into marriage – often by their own relatives. Young men can also be forced into marriage to women and girls in the UK for the purposes of legalised immigration. Both are not only criminal acts in the eyes of UK law, they also go against Quranic laws governing marriage too.

Islam regards marriage as a sacred right of the individual. No one, not even an elder relative, is permitted to make the decision for them. A marriage must only be entered into freely, happily and through the love of Allah. One of the requirements for the *Nikah* (marriage ceremony) to be valid is to ensure both the bride and groom are asked, independently of each other, whether they freely consent to the marriage. If either of them say 'no', the ceremony cannot continue. Where this is not done freely and either party feel under duress to concede to the marriage, the continuation of the marriage itself becomes a grave sin. All witnesses to an unwanted marriage share responsibility and have a duty to ensure no person is ever trafficked and forced into such a union.

DOMESTIC SERVITUDE

The practice of trafficking in 'help' continues to persist in many communities – both Muslim and non-Muslim. In a large number of cases, young girls and boys are trafficked by relatives under the guise of guardianship, to work 'for free' within the guardian's home. Often denied an education or freedoms in later life, this constitutes the enslavement of human will itself from a young age.

Alternatively, hired maids, nannies, builders, farm labourers and factory workers believing themselves to be legally hired persons, arrive in the UK willingly – only to find themselves stripped of all documentation and forced into slave labour. In other cases, women are forced into marriage and are placed in bondage through lifelong domestic servitude within the homes of their 'husbands' or 'in-laws'. All forms of domestic servitude need to be noted and reported – for it strips the individual of all free will.

DEBT BONDAGE

Holding a debt over the heads of an impoverished family so as to enslave their loved ones, continues to yield huge profits for many traffickers. Many of those trapped in debt bondage can spend their whole lives trying to pay off a debt which never ends, often remaining in their positions to safeguard the lives of their families while fearing for their own.

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

The trafficking of women and girls for the prostitution trade often involves physical violence, rape, drugging and threats to both their own lives and those of their loved ones, amongst many other crimes. The continuing abuse of women and girls by 'clients' stemming from all walks of life and faiths, coupled with a lack of willingness by many religious communities to aid women and girls to exit such a heinous trade, enables this form of slavery to prevail and grow.