



**Australian Government**  
**Australian Institute of Criminology**

# The role of marriage in human trafficking

**Australian Institute of Criminology**



# Overview of Presentation

- **Background and context**
- **Case studies**
- **AIC research**
  - Methodology
  - Findings
  - Discussion



# Background and context

- **Marriage identified as an important topic to explore**
- **Recent Australian media**
- **Recent cases**
- **Women on temporary visas particularly vulnerable**



# AIC Research

## Purpose

- To explore how marriage is used in human trafficking

## Methodology

- Analysis of case files
- Interviews with government agencies, NGOs, law enforcement & relevant assistance and support services
- Interviews with victims of trafficking or related exploitation
- Analysis of DIAC data
- Interview questions based on International Labour Organization's operational indicators



# Limitations

- Preliminary and exploratory
- First look at the nature of an emerging issue
- Not generalisable



# Key Findings

## Background of participants

- Pacific, Middle East, southeast Asia and Eastern Europe
- 18 - 49 years
- Range of push factors
- Educated
- Mix of employed and unemployed
- Cultural background of husbands



## Nature of the marriages

- Husband and wife met in various ways
- Significant role of family
- Offshore marriages
- First meeting at wedding or just prior to
- Partner visas



## Experience in Australia

- Domestic servitude

*“[My husband said] these are the rules and regulations. You should be caring for everything in the house, doing the cooking, washing, cleaning, and whenever I go to the shower you have to give me my toothbrush and towel. You must iron my clothes and make my food whenever I like and whatever I like... You must care for me... I brought you to give me money and help me in the house. If you don’t do those things I will send you back. Otherwise, it’s no use keeping you here” (survivor)*





*“When I arrived in Australia, my husband and I never shared the same bedroom. There was a room for me to stay in. My husband and his girlfriend left to stay at their own place... There were 16 people living in the house... My life was like a slave... there was always work to do in the house. My mother-in-law was always with me... I hardly ever got any rest or break during the day. If I sat down for 5 or 10 minutes my mother-in-law would find me something to do” (survivor)*



- Threat of deportation

*“[My husband said] I will return you to [country]... The law in Australia says that in the first two years of marriage if the husband says he doesn’t want to live with his wife anymore, then he can send her back...” (survivor)*

*“[My husband said] I will send you back to [country]. Do you want to go back to [country]?....My husband knew that my soft spot was to be sent back to [country] and he used this to his advantage” (survivor)*



- Threat or use of domestic violence
- Restricted movement and freedom
- Financial control
- Control of personal documents and passports
- Denial of medical assistance



## Exiting the situation

- Fear of reprisals

*“[My husband said] I can destroy you because you are an immigrant” (survivor)*

- Unsure where to get help
- Shame and stigma

*“...people would look down on me and my family, we would lose face and be embarrassed. No one would marry my younger sisters because of the scandal. I would not be valued in my community. I feel ashamed of myself” (survivor)*

- Importance of community centres and organisations



## Preventative measures and responses

- Information about Australian culture, laws and how to seek help
- Resourcing educational institutions for migrants, e.g. English classes
- Information on domestic violence
- Community awareness



## Victims' motivations to migrate

- Complex and multifaceted
- Chance occurrences
- Irony of women seeking egalitarian marriages



## Identification of cases

- First detected as domestic violence
- Victims and service providers rarely realise that cases are trafficking
- Family Violence Provisions used

*“Some of the things I never knew I was being abused. I thought that women here in Australia do the same” (survivor)*



## Financial exploitation and debt-bondage

- Gold digger or ‘golden egg’?
- Subtle forms of debt-bondage
- Revictimisation/extended victimisation