



Spotlight #4: Episode 6

Podcast transcript

Ada's Story: rebuilding my life after escaping forced marriage

Introduction:

Welcome to Spotlights, a series of online publications and events focusing on a particular group of victim/survivors who are often hidden from services. As a part of SafeLives Spotlight on 'honour' based violence and forced marriage, my colleague Deidre met with Ada. Ada shares her experience of escaping forced marriage and rebuilding her life with the help of the professionals who have supported her along the way. We hope you find her story as courageous as we have. Please note that names have been changed to protect identities.

I: Thanks for joining me today

R: It's great to be here

I: Good, great. Can you start out by just telling me about yourself?

R: Um, I think I'm, after my experience I appreciate life more. I changed the way I used to think before this used to happen. It's like I'm a new person, outgoing person, energetic, I like to do sport. That's it.

I: Ok, sounds good.

I: So, you said that after what happened to you, that you've changed a lot. Can you tell me about what happened to you?

R: Well, um, I was taken from one country to another thinking I was going on holiday, but it was actually I was going to get married. I did not find out til later, after a few months. I was locked in a house, I couldn't come out, come back to the UK. My passport was taken, and the only choice I had was to get married. At one point I thought there was no exit, but then one day I saw the opportunity, and I ran out of the house and I called the police.

I: and what happened when you called the police?

R: They took a statement off me, I had no id, so they no idea who I was. They took me to a detention centre, I stayed there for 20 days, and somebody bailed me out. And I stayed in another house, and then I went into a shelter, and then I went back to the UK.

I: Wow. And what was it like when you were in those shelters and detention centres in a foreign country.

R: Ah, I loved it. People think I'm crazy, but I in a house anymore, I wasn't locked in anymore, I wasn't getting married anymore, so everything after that, it was good for me.

I: And did it stay good for you?

R: Well, it stayed good for a few weeks. I met the guy I was meant to marry, his family and it hadn't a good experience.

I: So what, they just saw you out and about?

R: Yeah, they saw me out and about, they attacked me, ripped my clothes off and I just ran away. It took me about four or five hours to get back to the shelter.

I: Oh god, and what happened after that?

R: I said the police got involved. But the thing is I cannot press charges because they know it would be me and my case would be even harder.

I: Because they'll be able to find you?

R: Or they might hurt me more. So I told the police that I don't want to press charges. Let it be. I just wanna get out of here.

I: And that was back in the country that you were taken to?

R: Yeah,

I: And before you were taken there did you ever have any idea that you might be forced into a marriage? Was that something that you thought might happen to you?

R: No, I didn't think that was gonna happen. I thought that I could get out of it by saying no I don't want, no I don't want to. But there was no answer to it, no way of getting out of it, they said that you're getting married and that's it.

I: And who was putting that pressure on you?

R: My family, my aunties, my uncles.

I: And where were your parents?

R: My parents died when I was younger, when I was 7- 8, they both died so I was raised by my aunties. But I've always been, how can I say, more westernised. I wasn't allowed to play football, I wasn't allowed to put shorts on, because they were quite strict religious. So they were always one day you need to fix up, you need to follow your culture blah blah blah. And that's why I think they had to take me to another country to get married. I don't think it would have happened if I was here. Because I know a lot of people in England.

I: So they wouldn't have been able to isolate you as easily?

R: No, no.

I: So you were taken to this other country, they tried to force you to marry someone, you escaped, you went into these various detention centres, then a shelt, a home, they found you at one point and then you came back to the UK? What happened then?

R: I went back to where I used to live, and then I came here.

I: And what kind of place do you live in? Do you live in a house, a flat?

R: Who me, I live in a refuge

I: And what's that like?

R: It's like Buckingham Palace. As long as I can get out of the house when I want to, I can wear what I want to, I'm not married. I'd probably be pregnant by now if I was still up there.

I: You'd be married and pregnant? And living there?

R: And I'd never get out of the house.

I: So today life's much better than that?

R: Yeah, it's much better.

I: And what do you do now.

R: Due to my injury I cannot do a lot. But I used to do volunteer work, play football, come here. Just trying to get my life back on track.

I: And how did you feel that the professionals who helped you responded to your situation?

R: Good, I think they responded good. I don't know. To be honest, I never knew there were services that could support you and help people in my situation. Because to us, for me, it's like a normal thing: I've seen my grandmother, my aunties, my mother going through all that. But I never wanted to get married, especially to someone that I didn't want to get marry. But people just think that is the way it is, that is the way that it's supposed to be. They don't know that there are organisations or people that can help me.

I: SO....

R: I think I'm lucky,

I: You are.

R: So there might be another woman your age, who might be in a same situation, whose had their mother, and grandmother and aunties go through all of that, what's kind of your advice to them?

I: I would tell them just do what you want to do, don't do things because you have to please your family or your community, because that's not the way, we think that's the way because we grew up that way. But me, I don't know, I think I've always been different. So yeah, but some people think that there is no option there is no way out, but sometimes you just have to get on with it. It's not a situation, it doesn't have to be that way.

R: So you think that they can have a different life for themselves?

I: Yeah

R: How do you think professionals can best help them do that-what's the most helpful thing that a professional can do?

I: Put information out there. Let them people know that there is help, and let them think that's not the only way, there are other ways.

R: So when you grew up, you grew up with this notion that that's what was going to happen to you, that you were going to get married and have children.

I: Me?

R: Yeah, is this what you were told as you were growing up?

I: Yeah, you're born, you go to school, and at a certain age you get married, you have kids, and that's the woman's life. You don't get married, there is no career, there is a lot of things you want to do, but it's always what the elders want you to do even when you're 40 years old or 50 years old, you're always going to be told what to do.

R: By who, the elders?

I: Yeah, the elders in your family.

R: Ok, and they always have that control over your life, and you've gotten away. What do you want to do with your life now?

I: Me, I just want to enjoy my life. I don't want a lot; I just want to be free. I want to wear jeans if I want to wear jeans, play football if I want to play football, if I don't want to wear a scarf don't wear a scarf. It's

simple things, I don't want a lot. But when you have these things taken out from you, you feel like wow, like there is something wrong. But it's simple, it's not that big of a deal.

R: What made you realise that it wasn't right, if it was something you'd been taught since you were a little girl, what made you realise this isn't right the way that I'm being treated.

I: Because I never felt happy about it. If you do something and you're happy about it then maybe, it's right. But if you're not happy about it, it doesn't mean that it's right, if you have to just accept and get on with it. But I just don't, if I'm not happy about this "why do I have to do this?" "No, you just have to do it, there is no choice." You just get that brain wash. But as you get older, you go to school, you watch tv, you think, well other people don't have to do that why can't I do what I want? But you need to have a lot of courage or heart to do it. Me, I was quiet for a very long time until I couldn't handle it no more. So it had to be physically, lock me in the house physically because I would fly from the window, but it was too high, just to get out. But to get to that point, you have to get it up to here.

I: You mean, you have to have it up to your neck, you have to be desperate? And that's what happened to you, you were desperate.

I: Well, you sound like you've had a lot of strength and courage to come out of this.

R: Yeah, because I knew that once the wedding happened there would be no way out.

I: What do you think would have happened after the wedding?

R: I would have been located in a house with him, the guy I was meant to marry and that would be what it was. I just would have had to deal with him. I even met him, I told him, " please let's not get married, you don't know me, I don't know you". If he'd said no, my family would ease back off me. But he said no, no way "every woman says that, but once you get married in a few months you will have adjusted to your new life".

I: And what did you think when he said that?

R: I said, that's not going to happen, I'm not going to adjust to no new life.

I: How did he react to that?

R: Before I used to blame him, but now that time has gone past. If I was him, he's doing what he's being told as well. And because they made him think that because he's the man, it's all fancy, yeah it's going to get better, it will be better. I think that it won't be acceptable.

I: What do you think needs to change to change that mentality about this is what women are supposed to do and that's what men are supposed to do?

R: I have no idea, because this has gone on for centuries and you can't stop it. That thing will always be there. I just think that the woman needs to be aware that there is help and if she goes somewhere, you know, there will be help. That's the only thing there is.

I: Do you have anything you want to say?

R: Yeah, I would like to thank those people over in that country that helped me. People that still today they are still helping me. I just want to thank them. I don't know how I would ever show how much I appreciate. I don't know where I would be if it wasn't for them.

I: Sounds like you appreciate the life that you have now.

R: Yeah, I do I do, even the little air from the window, I do.

I: Thanks for doing this, and I hope that it encourages professionals to keep doing what they're doing, and anybody who might be in a similar situation, to know that there is something else out there for them if they want it.

R: Yeah, if they want it.

Conclusion: Thank you for listening. If you'd like to find out more about Safelives Spotlight on 'honour' – based violence and forced marriage, go to our website SafeLives.org.uk where we will be uploading content every week, each exploring a different aspect of 'honour' based violence and forced marriage. And if you'd like to participate in the discussion, you can join the live Twitter Q&A on the 8th June from 10-11am. Just go to #YourChoice.