

# Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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## Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website.

9 February 2012

### PAK103957.E

Pakistan: Arranged marriages between Sunnis and Shias, including whether families are aware of the religions of both families before they agree to the arrangement, particularly in the city of Mirpur, Azad Jammu and Kashmir  
 Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

In correspondence with the Research Directorate on 23 December 2011, a University of Oregon professor of international studies who specializes in women's rights and Islam in Pakistan provided the information about arranged marriages between Sunni and Shia Muslims in this paragraph. Arranged marriages between Sunni and Shia Muslims are "not uncommon," although they occur far less often among the Pakhtun [also spelled as Pashtun], Ismaili and Bohra Shia and Memon communities. There are "[v]ery slight" differences in the traditional marriage ceremonies of Sunni Muslims and the main branch of Shia Muslims, the "Twelver"; however, in contemporary society, traditions are "very negotiable" and differences are "quite negligible." The professor stated that there can be great variance in the level of knowledge that each family has of the other before the consent to marriage is given. Although each family should in theory know the other very well, they often do not, and cases exist wherein the bride's family "barely met" the bridegroom prior to the marriage.

In contrast to the professor's statements, a representative of Shirkat Gah, a Pakistani women's rights organization promoting social and economic development for women (Shirkat Gah n.d.), stated in correspondence with the Research Directorate that arranged marriages between Sunni and Shia Muslims are "very rare" (24 Jan. 2012). The representative indicated, further, that it is normal for two families arranging a marriage to be familiar with each other's beliefs, particularly if they live in the same community (29 Jan. 2012).

Information on arranged marriages in Mirpur, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

## References

Professor of International Studies, University of Oregon. 23 December 2011. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Shirkat Gah. 29 January 2012. Correspondence with the Manager, Advocacy Unit.

\_\_\_\_\_. 24 January 2012. Correspondence with the Manager, Advocacy Unit.

\_\_\_\_\_. N.d. "About Us." <<http://www.shirkatgah.org/about-us.html>> [Accessed 14 Nov. 2011]

## Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Professors from Quaid-i-Azam University, Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali, and Boston University, as well as representatives of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Community Development Program and the Mirpur University of Science and Technology, were unable to provide information for this Response. Representatives from the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and the Kashmiri-Canadian Council were unable to provide information within the time constraints of this Response. Attempts to contact professors at McGill University, the University of Toronto, Carleton University, the University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir; a Pakistan-based human rights journalist; the Council of Islamic Ideology in Pakistan; and the Canada-Pakistan Association of Niagara Region were unsuccessful.

**Internet sites, including:** Association for Women's Rights in Development; BBC; *Dawn.com*; European Country of Origin Information Network; Factiva; *The Guardian*; HilalPlaza.com; Hot Peach Pages; Human Rights Watch; Ireland Legal Aid Board; Islam Globe; Islamic Sharia Council; Minority Rights Group International; The Muslim Institute; Muslim Marriage Contract; *Pakistan Observer*; Plus News

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Pakistan; Shirkat Gah; SAGE Journals; Social Policy and Development Centre; Social Science Research Network; United Nations - Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, Integrated Regional Information Networks, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, RefWorld; United Kingdom Border Agency; United States Institute of Peace; United States - Department of State, Library of Congress; University of Oregon; Warwick School of Law; *The Washington Post*; Women Living under Islamic Laws; Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality.

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Date modified: 2013-07-17

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