



RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

[New Search](#) | [About RIR's](#) | [Help](#)

28 May 2004

SYR42693.FE

Syrian Arab Republic: Forced marriages in Christian families; state protection available
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

According to an article published in *Arabic News*, forced marriages are a violation of men's and women's right to equality, as guaranteed under the Syrian constitution; in some cases, these marriages are considered criminal (12 Mar. 2001). The author stated that "[f]orced marriage occurs within diverse cultures, traditions, nationalities, races and religions," but that the incidence of these marriages in Arab countries is diminishing (*Arabic News* 12 March 2001). These statements could not be corroborated by the other sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

An anthropologist at California State University provided the following information during a 25 May 2004 telephone interview with the Research Directorate. The anthropologist said that marriages serve to create or strengthen bonds between families, but she did not have any specific information regarding forced marriages among Christians in Syria. She did say, however, that the subject was difficult to address because it varies from one family to another. According to her, forced marriages are generally practised by all communities in the country.

An Oregon State University sociologist who is an expert in the sociology of women provided the following information in a 25 May 2004 telephone interview. She did not know whether forced marriages were practised by the Christian community in Syria, but she did say that forced marriages occur among people of all religions in the country, making it a cultural phenomenon rather than a religious one. She added that, though rare, marriages between Muslim men and Christian women do exist.

In general, most marriages in Syria are arranged by parents, who introduce female candidates to a young man, generally in his late 20s or early 30s and with a good financial situation. Once the man chooses a candidate, she then normally has the choice to accept or refuse the marriage. However, the sociologist said that, in the best of cases, pressure rapidly increases on the woman to accept her suitor if she has already refused many proposals. Young women from the poorest levels of society in particular often believe that their entire future depends on accepting a suitor for a husband. In such a case, a young woman who refuses a marriage risks having her family turn against her and losing her financial and moral support-support that is sometimes crucial to her survival and cannot be found elsewhere.

With regard to the protection offered by the Syrian authorities, the California State University anthropologist reported their lack of power over family matters (25 May 2004). In general, a woman caught in an abusive situation will not call upon the government authorities unless she has exhausted all other resources, including family and friends (anthropologist 25 May 2004). Young Christian women who run away with their lovers without the consent of their parents risk serious repercussions from their families, and cannot rely on the police to intervene (*ibid.*).

The sociologist at Oregon State University corroborated the anthropologist's description of a woman's

insecurity when forced to marry (25 May 2004). According to her, any attempt made by a Syrian woman to escape a forced marriage can endanger her life (sociologist 25 May 2004).

The sociologist also said that there is a major difference between the law and its application when it comes to women's rights, and gave the example of women who run away to avoid a marriage or to have an affair with a lover (ibid.). In these cases, the situation is particularly dangerous for the woman (ibid.). If a male member of her family decides to kill her, it would not be considered a murder in the traditional sense of the word; this kind of killing is regarded as an [translation] "honour crime," and the perpetrators are considered to have committed negligent homicide (ibid.). The sociologist also pointed out that the courts generally side with the husband in divorce cases-a woman must therefore face the hostility of her own family, in addition to the danger from her husband's family (ibid.). If she decides to leave the country, the woman's husband or male relatives can refuse to give their consent and intercept her at the airport-an act that the government could not prevent (ibid.).

The opinions of the two specialists could not be corroborated by the other sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints for this Response.

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 additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Anthropologist, California State University, San Bernadino. 25 May 2004. Telephone interview.

Arabic News. 12 March 2001. "Forced Marriage and International Human Rights Norms." <<http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/010312/2001031230.html>> [Accessed 19 May 2004]

Sociologist specializing in sociology of women. Oregon State University, Corvallis. 25 May 2004. Telephone interview.

Additional Sources Consulted

Attempts to contact professors specializing in Arab sociology at the following institutions were unsuccessful:

- Centre for Arab and Iranian Studies
- London Middle East Institute
- St. Edwards University, Austin, Texas

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International (AI), European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI), Freedom House, Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Syria Times*, United States Department of State, World News Connection (WNC)


[Top of Page](#)

[Important Notices](#)

The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.