

# Forced Marriage in the United States

A Training for Victim Services Providers In Rural Communities

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**Hellitz Villegas:** Forced Marriage Initiative Manager | **Briana Roberts:** Forced Marriage Initiative Associate  
**Genevieve Meyer:** Indiana Trafficking Victims Assistance Program Statewide Coalition Development Coordinator

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**Geneveive Meyer**  
**Indiana Statewide Coalition Development Coordinator**  
**Child Marriage/Human Trafficking Lived Experience Expert**

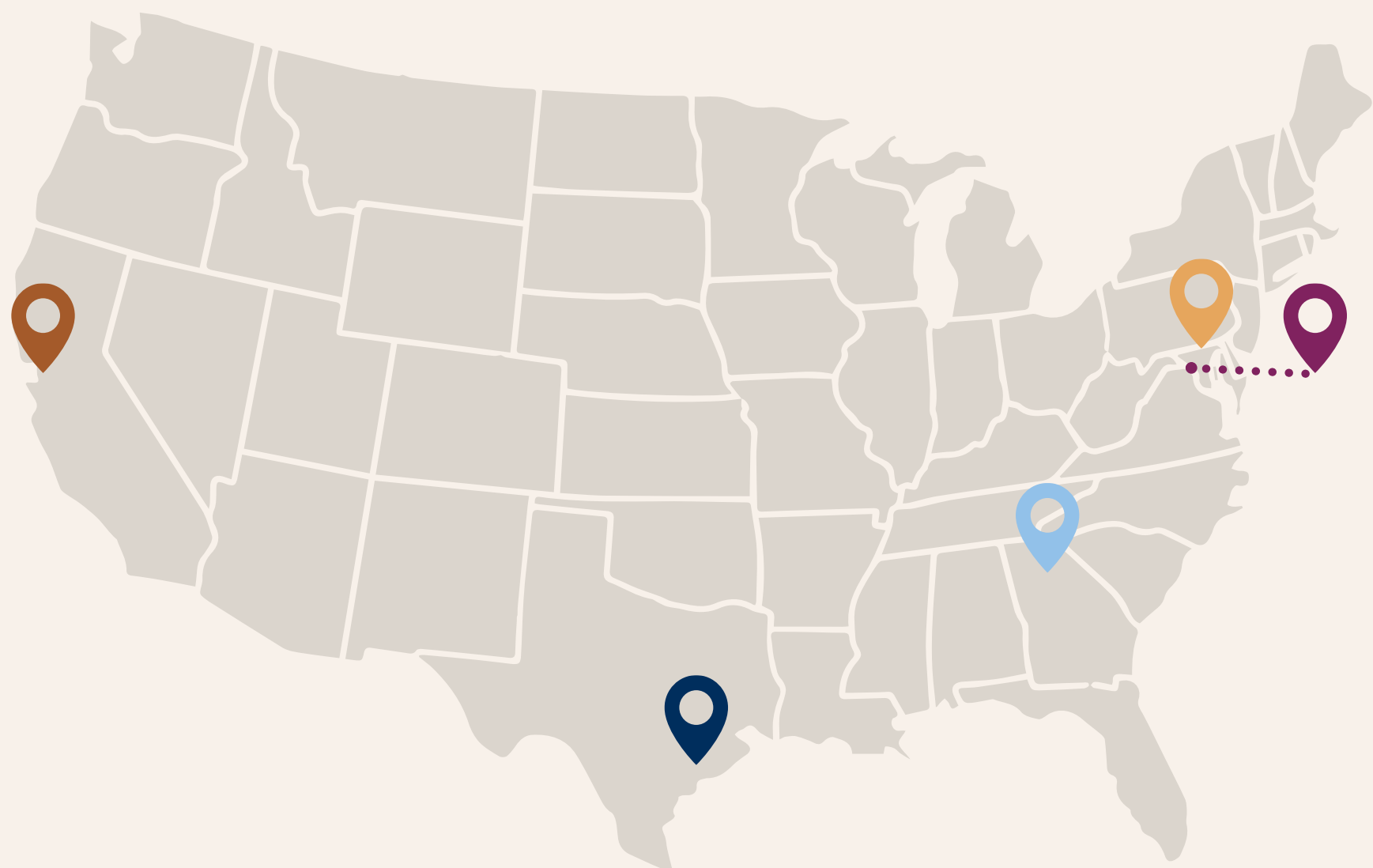
**ITVAP**

Indiana Trafficking Victims Assistance Program





# TAHIRIH



## Legal Services

We represent immigrant women and girls who we believe have a legitimate claim to lawful status under U.S. immigration law as survivors of gender-based violence.

## Social Services

We connect our clients to shelter, health services, food pantries, and other services so they can gain greater control over their lives.

## Forced Marriage Initiative

We provide confidential support to individuals of all ages and backgrounds who are facing or who have faced a forced marriage in this country or abroad.



## Our Work

- Spearheaded the first campaign to end child marriage in the U.S. in partnership with survivors and local service providers
- Develop resources and practical tools
- Provide direct services nationally to individuals of all ages and backgrounds with stable status in the U.S.
- Chair the National Forced Marriage Working Group
- Co-Chair of Girls Not Brides U.S.
- **Forced marriage defined in VAWA 2022 Reauthorization**
- FMI funded by OVW to provide TTA

# FORCED MARRIAGE INITIATIVE

To date, the FMI has provided direct support or technical assistance to over 1,000 individuals and have trained over 4,000 service providers.

# CONTACT US FOR TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE



- \* Receive guidance on intake/assessment protocols to recognize forced marriage within the populations you serve.
- \* Receive customized training and 1:1 support.
- \* Expand your knowledge on the connection between forced marriage and other forms of abuse.
- \* Receive resources and up to date information on your state laws.
- \* Be connected with culturally appropriate trained service providers.
- \* Explore ways your funding may support forced marriage survivors.



"...any information would be helpful; this is a new area for me.."

"...training on how to better recognize forced marriage would be helpful so advocates can recognize the signs when the survivor may not..."

**2024 Tahirih Field Assessment**









# DISCUSSION QUESTION



What are some of the barriers you encounter when supporting victims/survivors or those at risk?



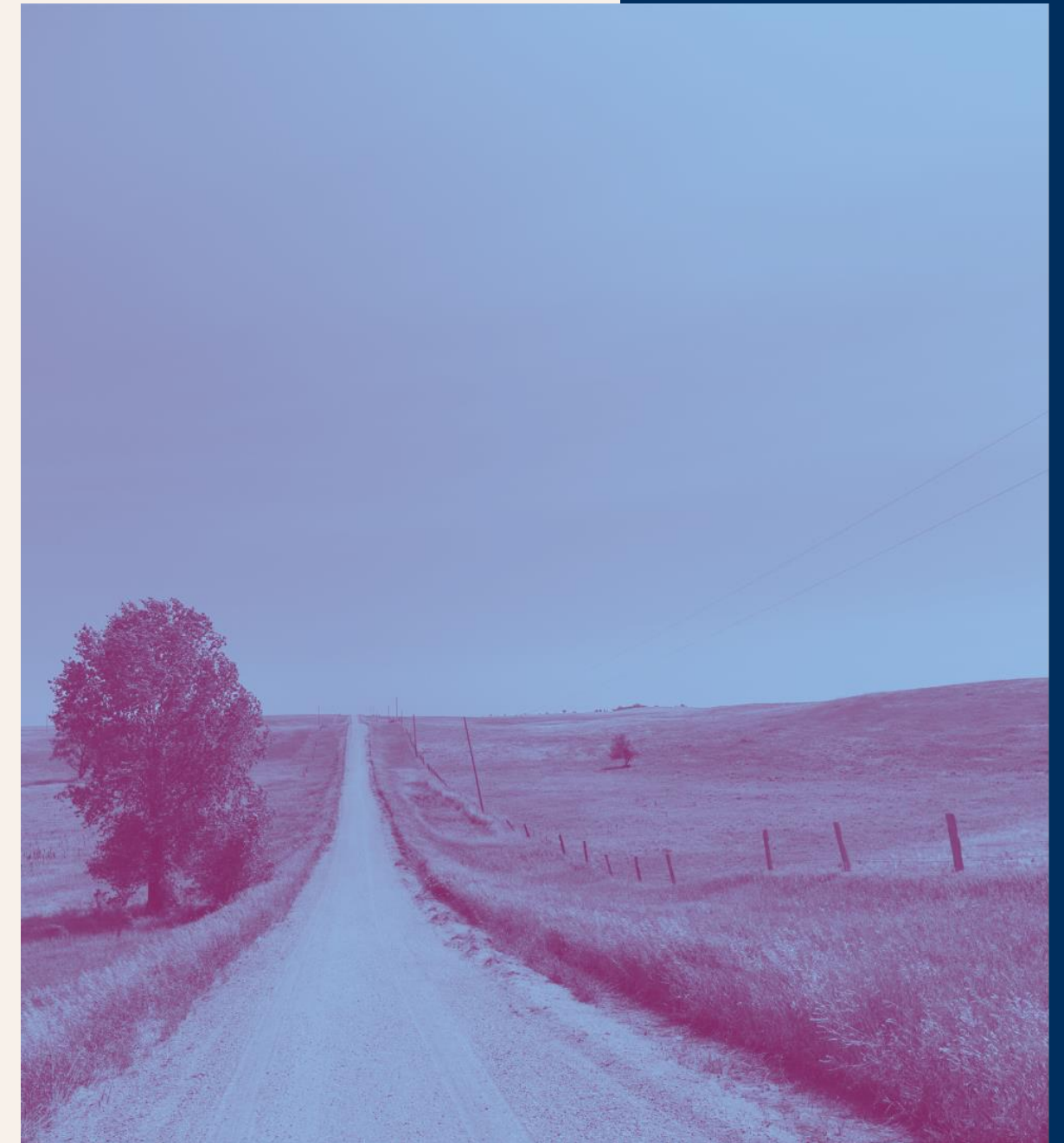
# BARRIERS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

## Isolation

- Transportation
- Language access
- Lack of culturally specific resources

## Communities within Communities

- Access
- Known to "Helpers"







# REFLECTION QUESTION



How do you currently address these barriers?



# FORCED MARRIAGE





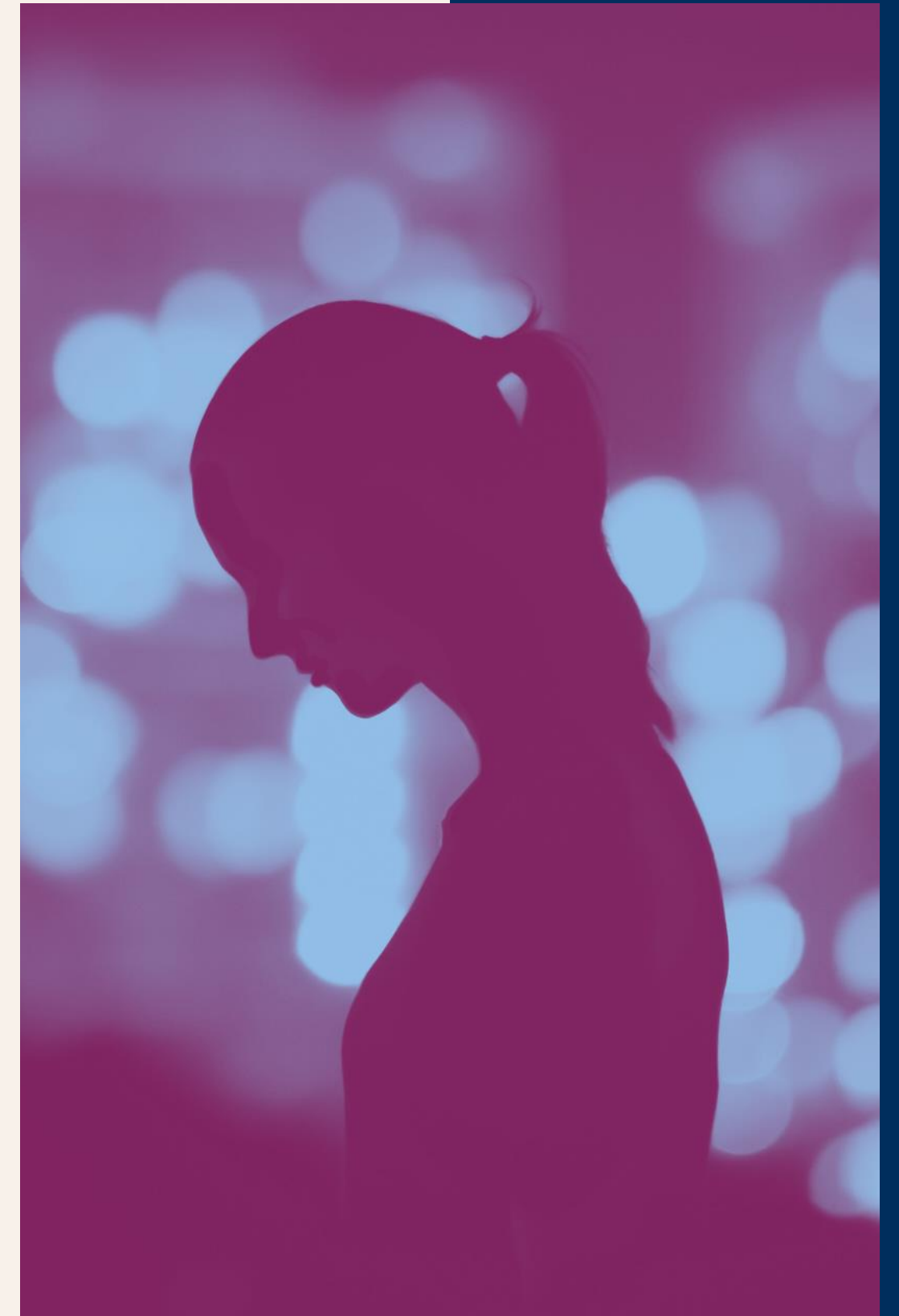
# WHAT IS FORCED MARRIAGE?

## **Forced marriage IS:**

A marriage where one or both people do not (or cannot) consent to the marriage, and typically involves elements of force, fraud, or coercion.

## **Forced marriage IS NOT:**

Arranged marriage, in which families may take the lead, but the ultimate choice to marry remains with the individual.



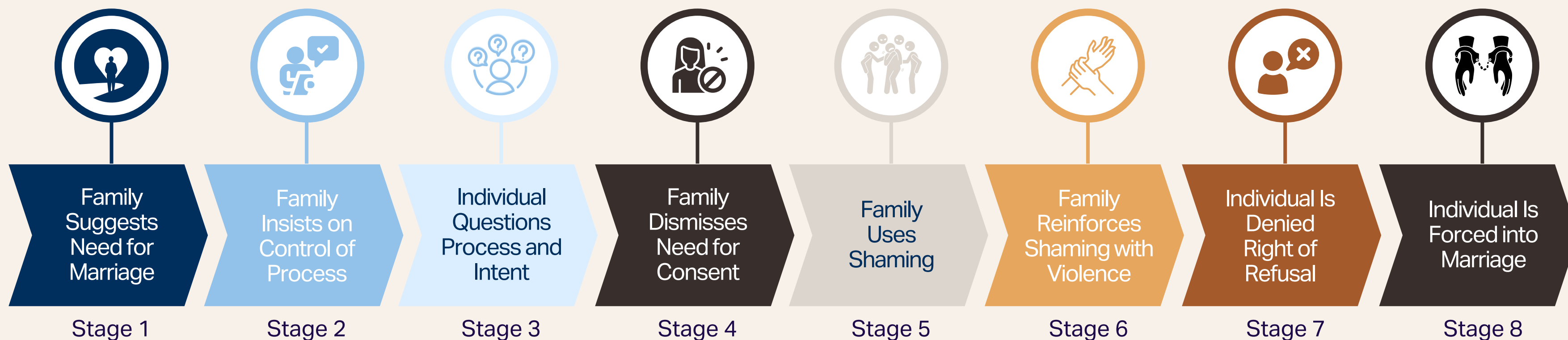




# ARRANGED VS. FORCED MARRIAGE

## Arranged

## Forced



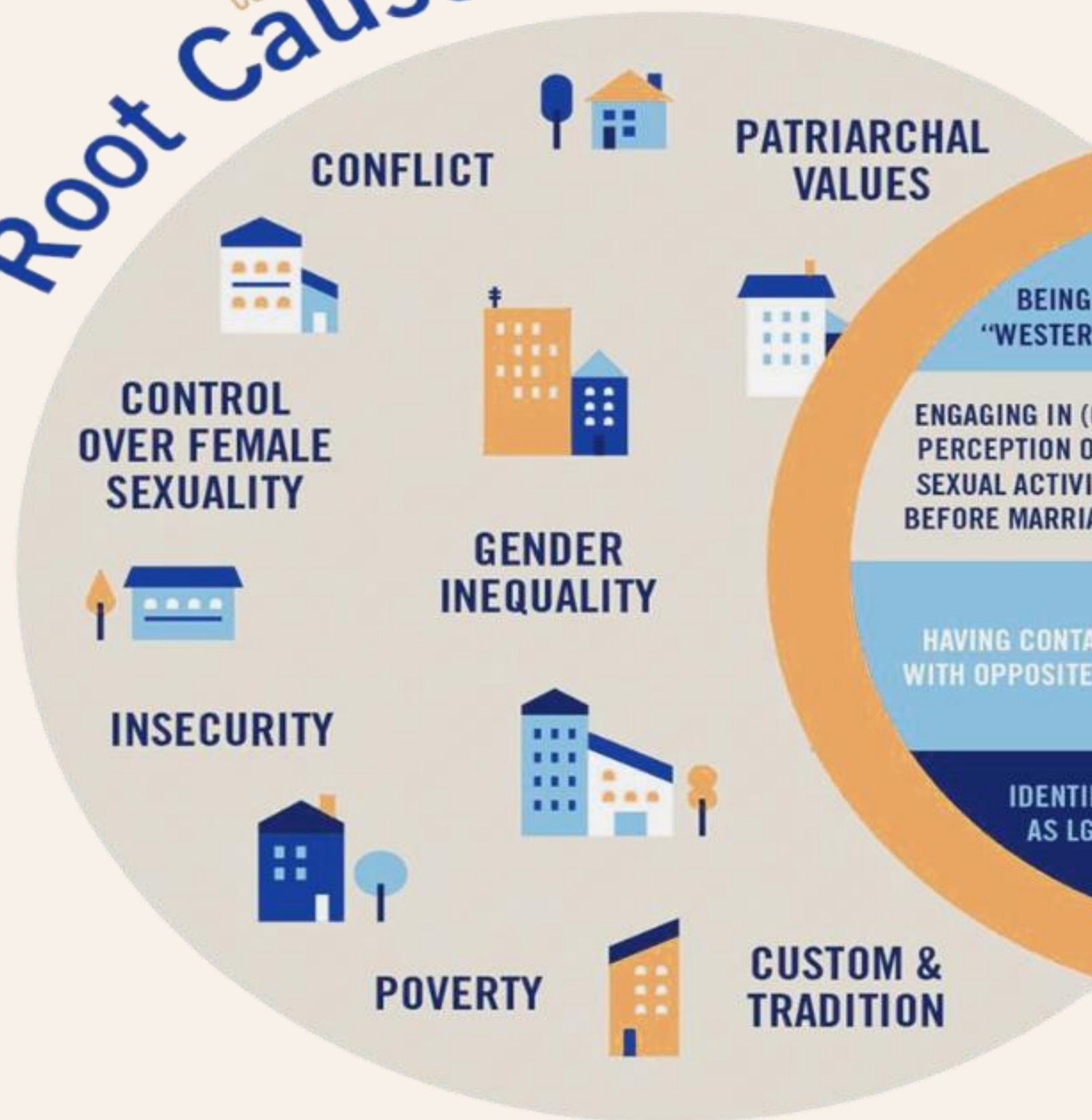
Graphic A: A Forced Marriage Continuum

Copyright Vidya Sri & Darakshan Raja (2013)



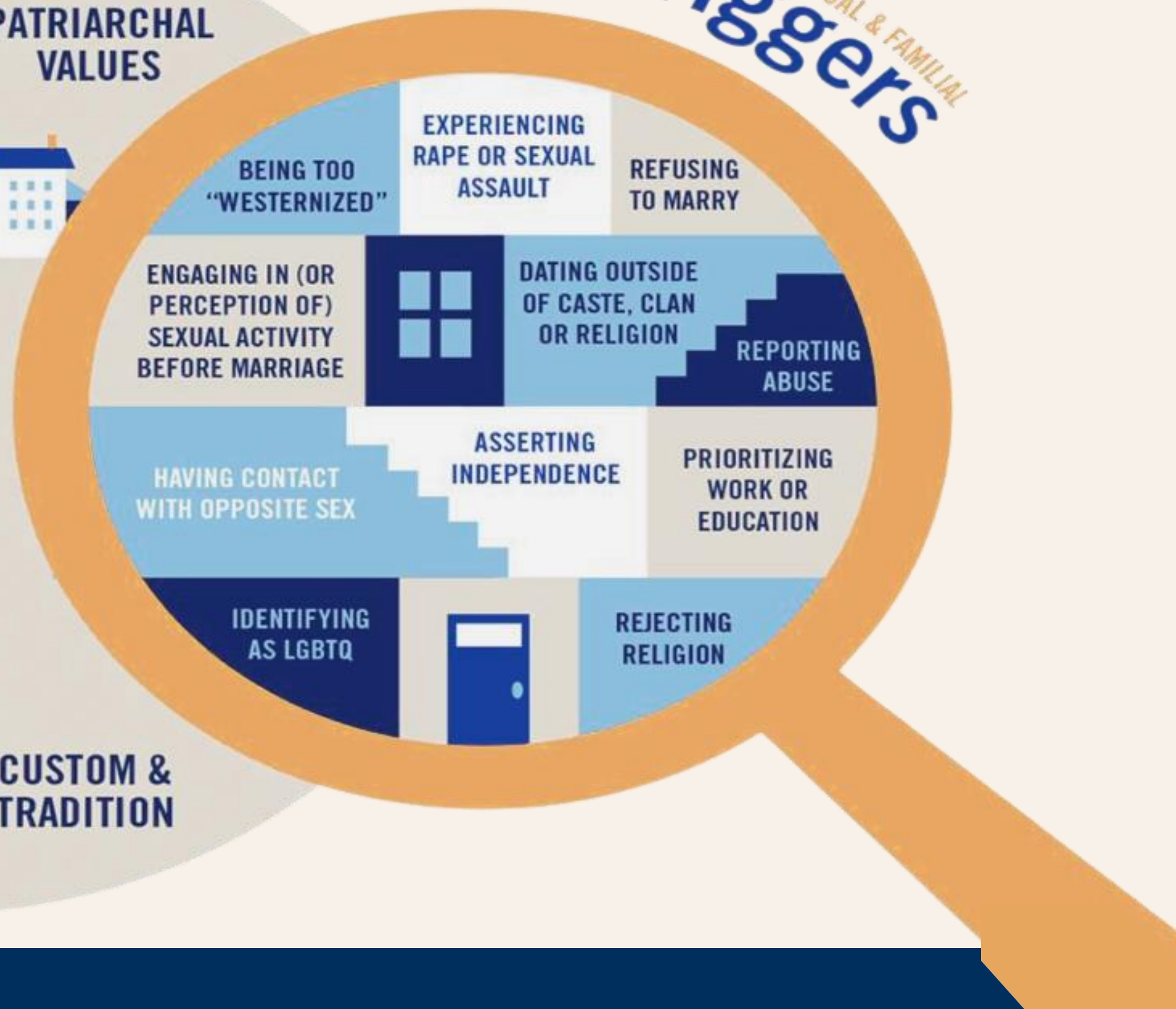
# Root Causes

COMMUNAL & SOCIETAL



# Triggers

INDIVIDUAL & FAMILIAL





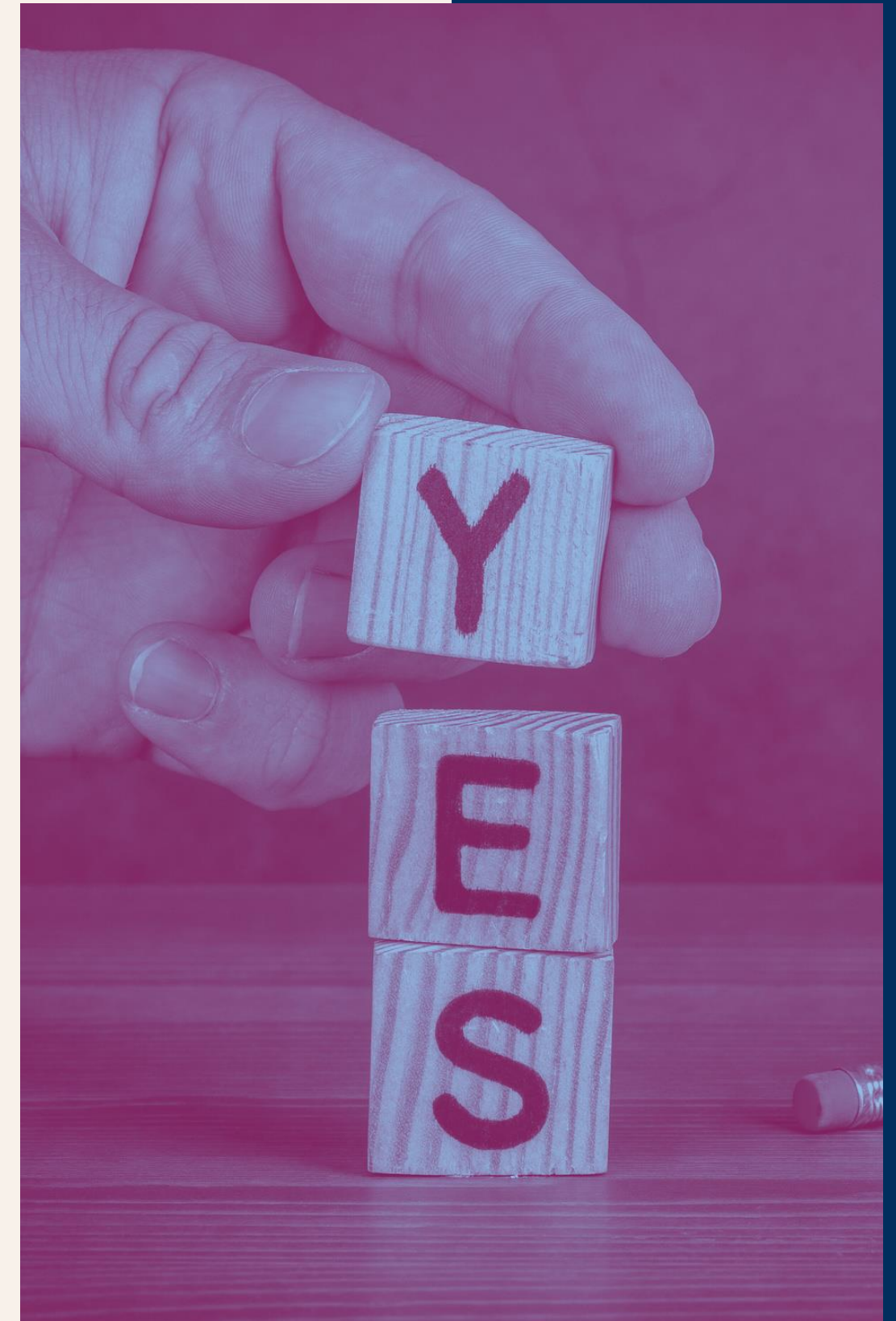
# CONSENT

## YES!

- ✓ I can freely express my wishes and opinions without negative consequences, or fear.
- ✓ I want to get married.
- ✓ I want to get married to this person.
- ✓ I want to get married right now, or the timeline discussed.

### **Lack of consent can be caused by an individual being...**

- Subject to force, fraud, or coercion.
- Subject to some incapacity or disability.
- Younger than the legal age to marry.







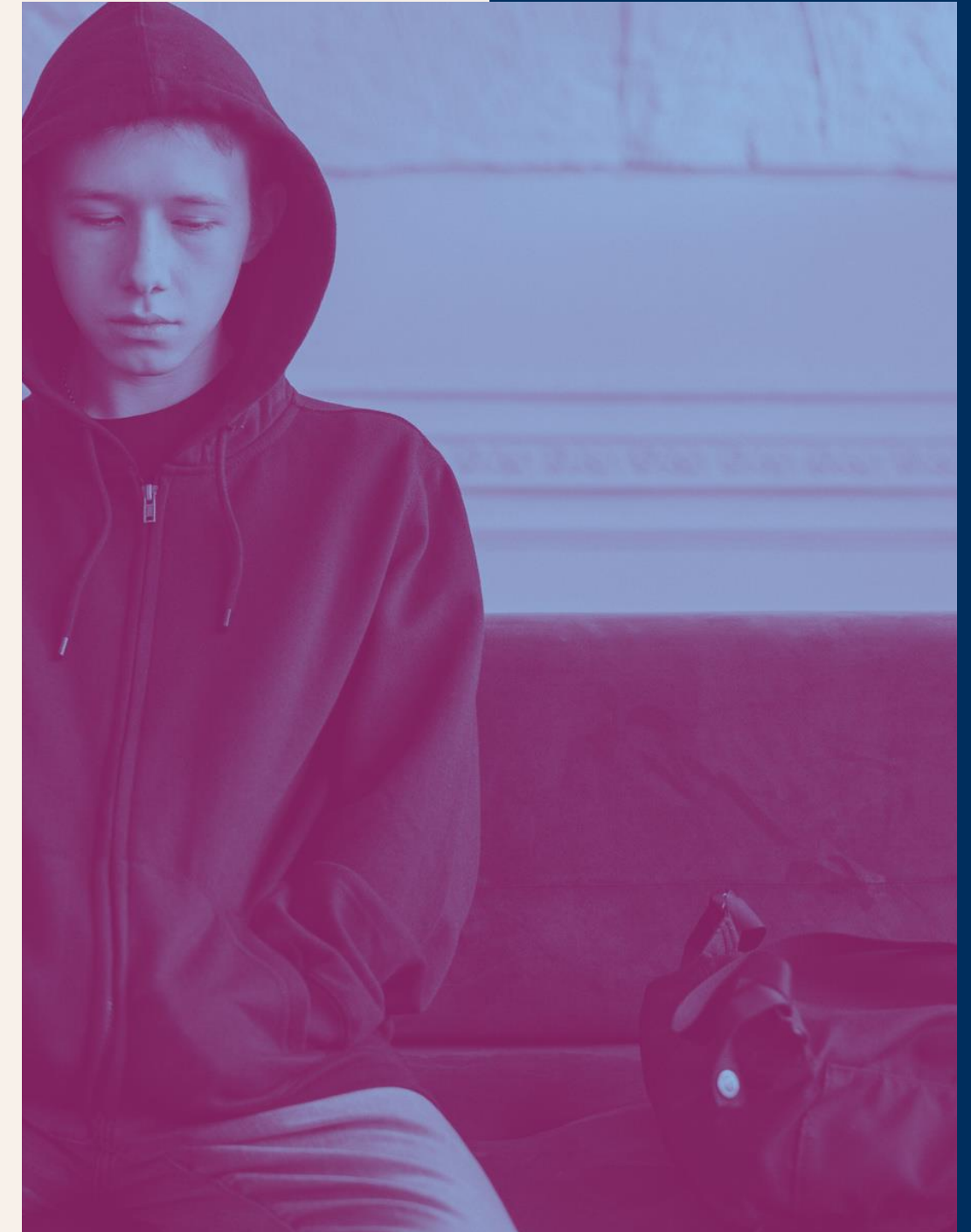
# CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE U.S.

The majority of child marriages in the U.S. appear to involve several concerning factors:

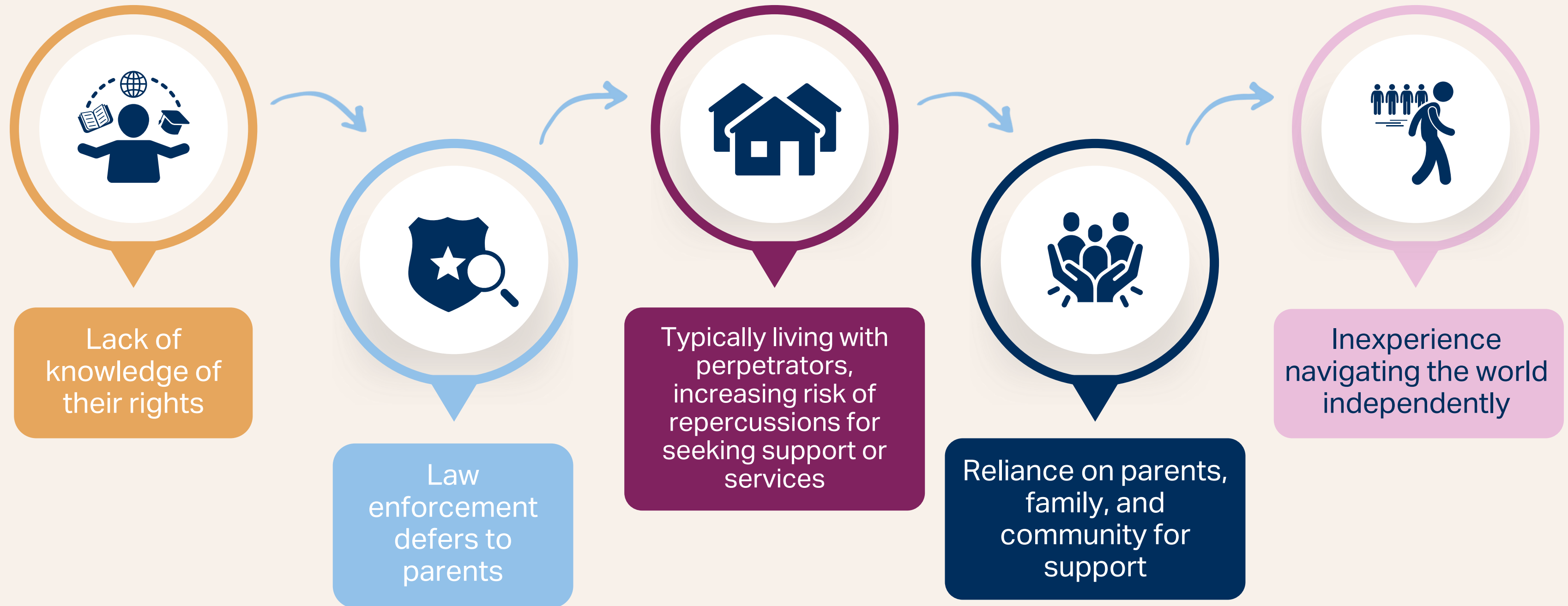
- Vast majority of cases involve girls marrying adult men
- Some of those adults were decades older
- Marriage ages lower than age of consent
- Parental consent exceptions enable parental coercion

"That little girl was me, and my perfect soccer mom did not look like an abuser. No one saw her for what she was, and no one helped me."

**Survivor story compilation**



# HEIGHTENED RISK: AGE



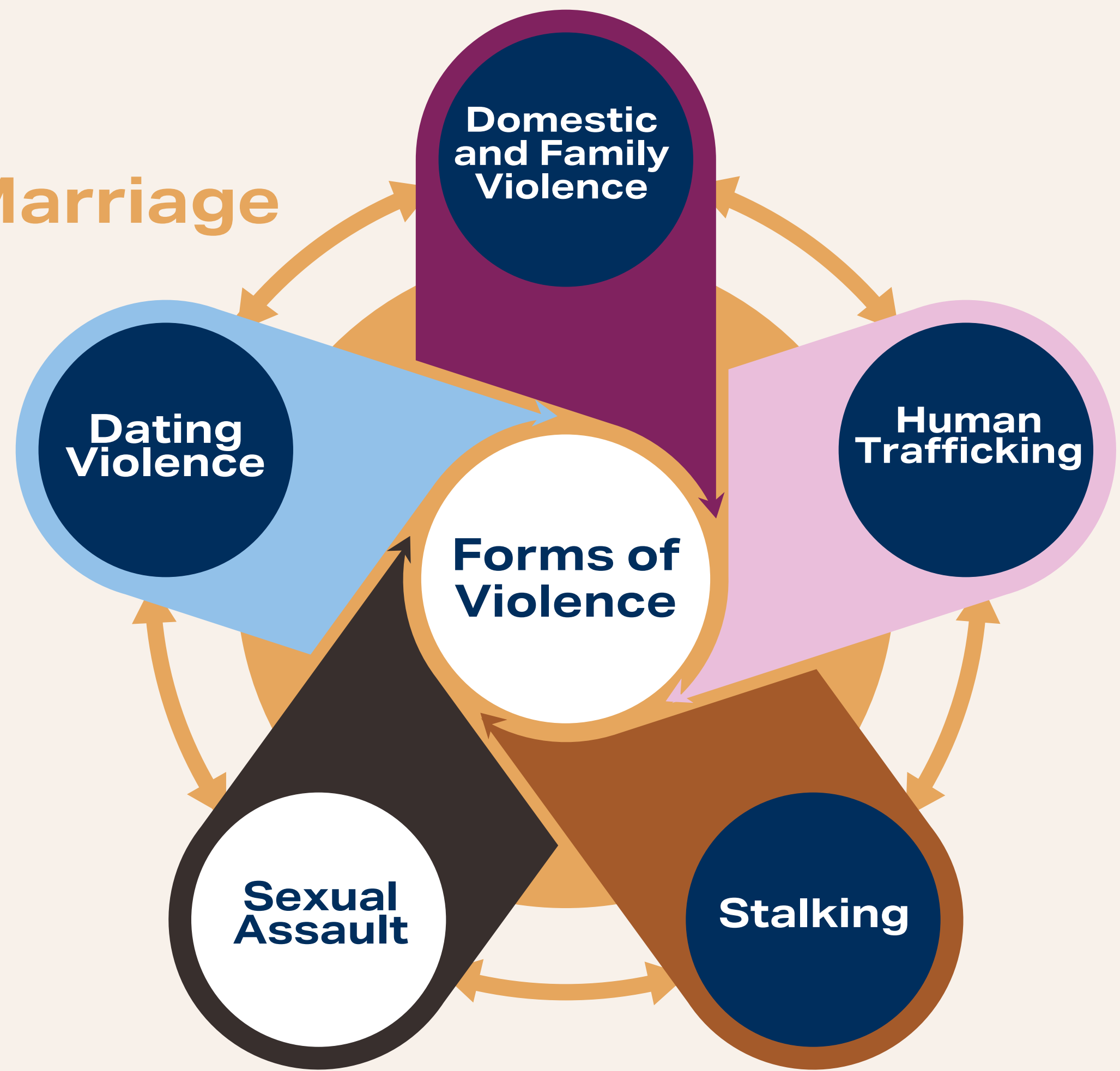


# FORCED MARRIAGE AT THE INTERSECTION





# Forced Marriage





# FORCED MARRIAGE AT THE INTERSECTION

Forced marriage is often one part of a spectrum of other harms that a person who is forced to marry may face in their lifetime.

- Child Abuse
- Domestic and Family Violence
- Stalking
- Dating Violence
- Human Trafficking
- Rape and Sexual Assault
- Female Genital Cutting

“Advocates speak to many women who are facing domestic violence, abuse, and/or sexual assault in their marriage.

Only later does it emerge that the conditions upon which they may have been married were under duress... and ultimately against their will.” (Debjani Roy, 2011)





# FORCED MARRIAGE AT THE INTERSECTION

## Child Abuse

A child or teenager being forced into marriage by her family may be subjected to multiple coercive tactics that, taken together, amount to child abuse.

In the case of a minor, the harms that follow a forced marriage also amount to child abuse.

## Rape and Sexual Assault

Non-consensual sexual conduct and behavior may follow a non-consensual marriage.

Advocates and researchers have also found that sexual assault and rape can not only be a consequence - but also a cause - of forced marriage.





# FORCED MARRIAGE AT THE INTERSECTION

## Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting

FGM/C can be a precursor to marriage. Could be a factor in family and community decision making about acceptable marriage partners – marriage may trigger risk of FGM/C.

The survivor may face ongoing pressure and abuse around FGM/C throughout the course of marriage and childbirth.

## Human Trafficking

Some cases may involve elements of forced labor. Some cases may involve forced marriage to perpetrators.

Some forced marriages may have elements of human trafficking if the driving motivation for the family is financial, to settle a debt or obtain a bride price.



# FORCED MARRIAGE AT THE INTERSECTION

## Domestic and Family Violence

The forms of abuse, coercion, intimidation, pressure, and fraud that are employed against victims of forced marriage are often indistinguishable from the forms of abuse and control utilized by perpetrators in domestic and family violence contexts.

## Stalking

Family members often use stalking behaviors to create a severe sense of isolation and hopelessness.

Stalking often continues following the marriage in order to restrict the survivor's independent mobility and privacy, again with the intent of limiting her ability seek help.



# FORCED MARRIAGE AT THE INTERSECTION

## Dating Violence

Violence committed by a person who is or has been in a social relationship of a romantic or intimate nature with the victim; and where the existence of such a relationship shall be determined based on a consideration of the following factors: The length of the relationship, type of relationship, frequency of interaction between the persons involved in the relationship.

Marriages forced by chosen partners, non-consensual partners, or predators.

Perpetrators may be minors and adults.



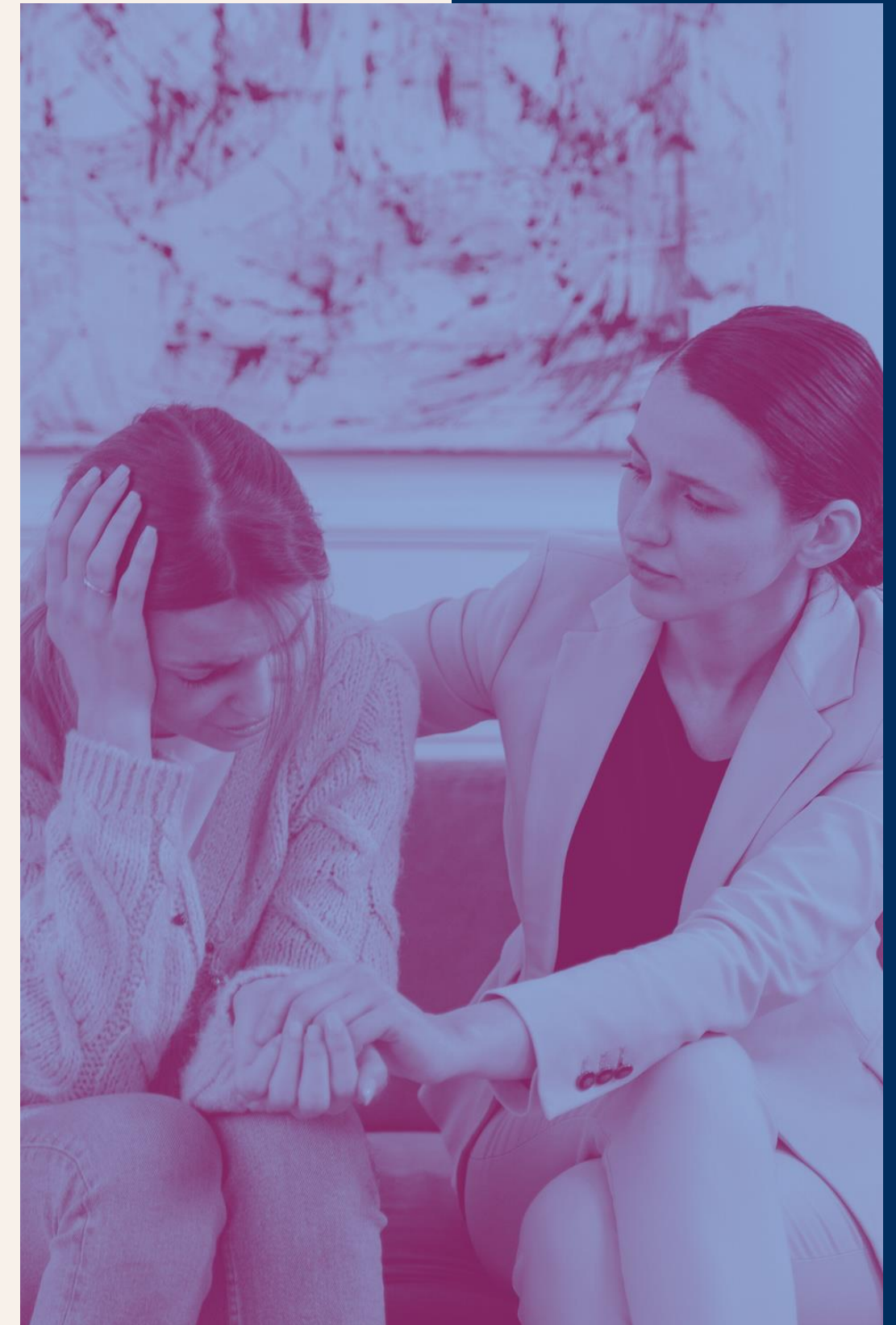
# SCREENING AND RESPONDING





# WARNING SIGNS

- \* Accompanied by family members to all appointments and never left alone
- \* Anxiety, depression, isolation, emotional withdrawal
- \* Self-harm or attempted suicide
- \* Early, unwanted, or concealed pregnancy
- \* FGM/C-virginity testing
- \* Death of a parent
- \* Runaway history
- \* Fear of upcoming holidays, unsure if returning, unsure if continuing school or work
- \* Family History:
  - Siblings forced to marry or had early marriages
  - Self-harm or suicide attempts by siblings

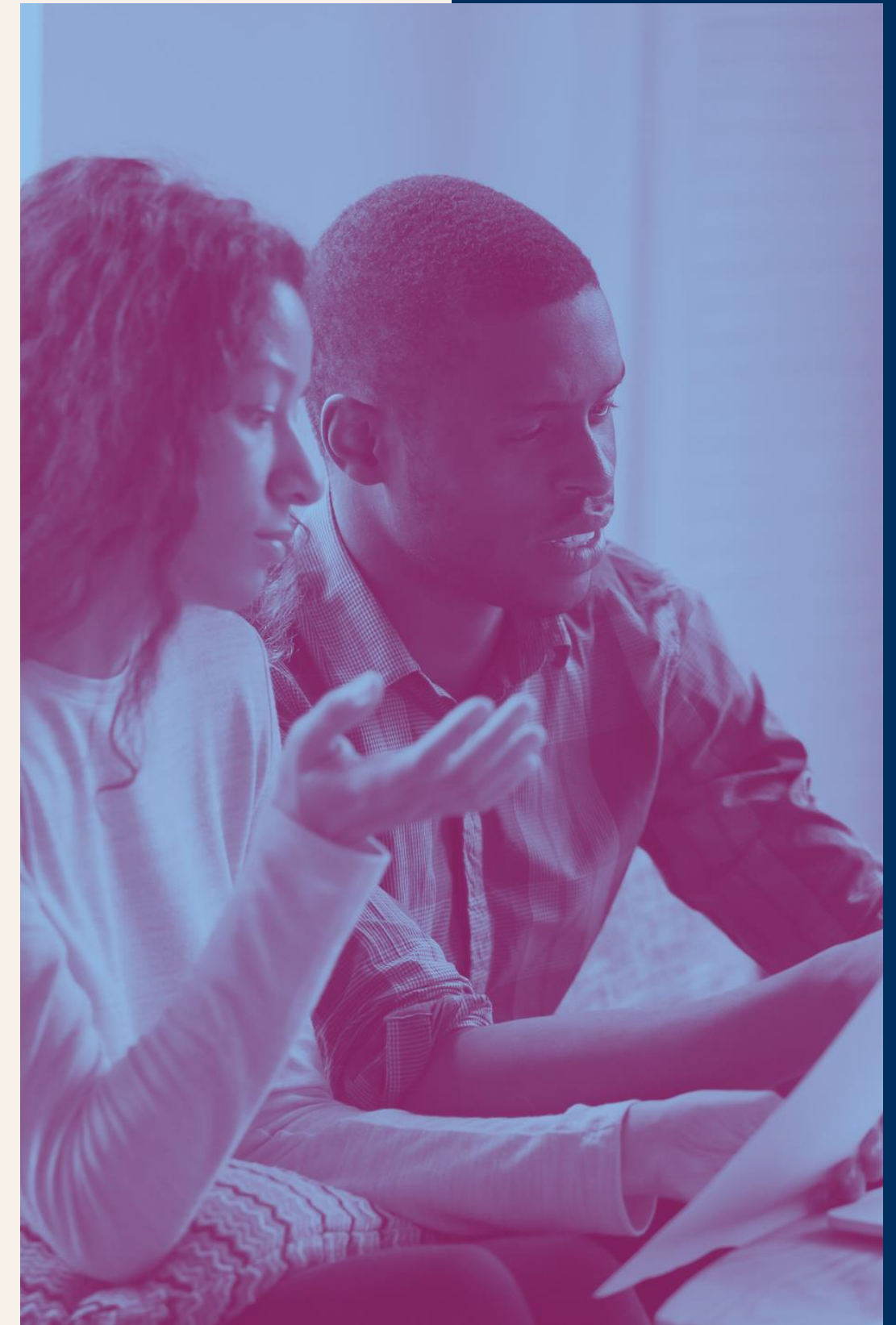






# CONSIDERATIONS

- \* Be curious, not accusatory.
- \* Always explain mandatory reporting mandates.
- \* Ask the individual what they think could be helpful.
- \* Do not engage others including family or other colleagues.
- \* Do not assume that colleagues of similar or same background should intervene or that they would be helpful.
- \* Do not act a mediator.





# WORKING WITH MINORS

**Ask about and document their perception of risk.**

- What will saying “no” to the marriage mean?
- Establish a way to communicate and check-in.
- Identify survivors’ strengths, assets, and any trusted friends or allies.

**Outline and discuss options and potential outcomes.**

**ALWAYS** provide a safe space for the minor to speak with you confidentially and if necessary, connect with expert advocates in the field and be open to role sharing and coordination.

**DO NOT** make promises you cannot truly keep!



**ALWAYS EXPLAIN  
MANDATORY  
REPORTING AND  
THE PROCESS  
OF THE  
INVESTIGATION!**



# WAYS TO ASK

- \* How has marriage taken place in your family/community in the past? How do you feel about that for yourself?
- \* Do you feel you have a choice in deciding who you will marry?
- \* How is/was your marriage partner being selected? Who is involved?
- \* Are you being pressured to marry someone who you do not want to marry, or are not sure about?







# WAYS TO ASK

- \* Be curious, not accusatory.
- \* Find a natural way to have a 1:1 conversation.
- \* Ask the individual what they think could be helpful.
- \* Do not engage others including family or other colleagues.
- \* Do not assume that colleagues of similar or same background should intervene or that they would be helpful.





# ASSUMPTIONS OF "CULTURE" LEAVE VICTIMS WITH FEW OPTIONS

- \* It is never "all families".
- \* "That's just how they do things" is not an excuse for abuse. → "Culture is not an excuse for abuse."
- \* A person can love many aspects of their culture, religion, family and community but "some traditions, or expectations do reach their expiration date."
- \* Be open: Sometimes we don't know what we don't know.
- \* Fear of being "prejudiced" can actually lead to negative assumptions, perceptions, and actions.







# REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- \*What could collaboration/MOUs with local providers look like to increase victim safety?
- \*What could collaboration/MOUs with an agency in a larger city that could provide the needed services look like?



# OUR ROLE IN PREVENTION AND HEALING

We do this work from a **non-judgmental** point of view about:

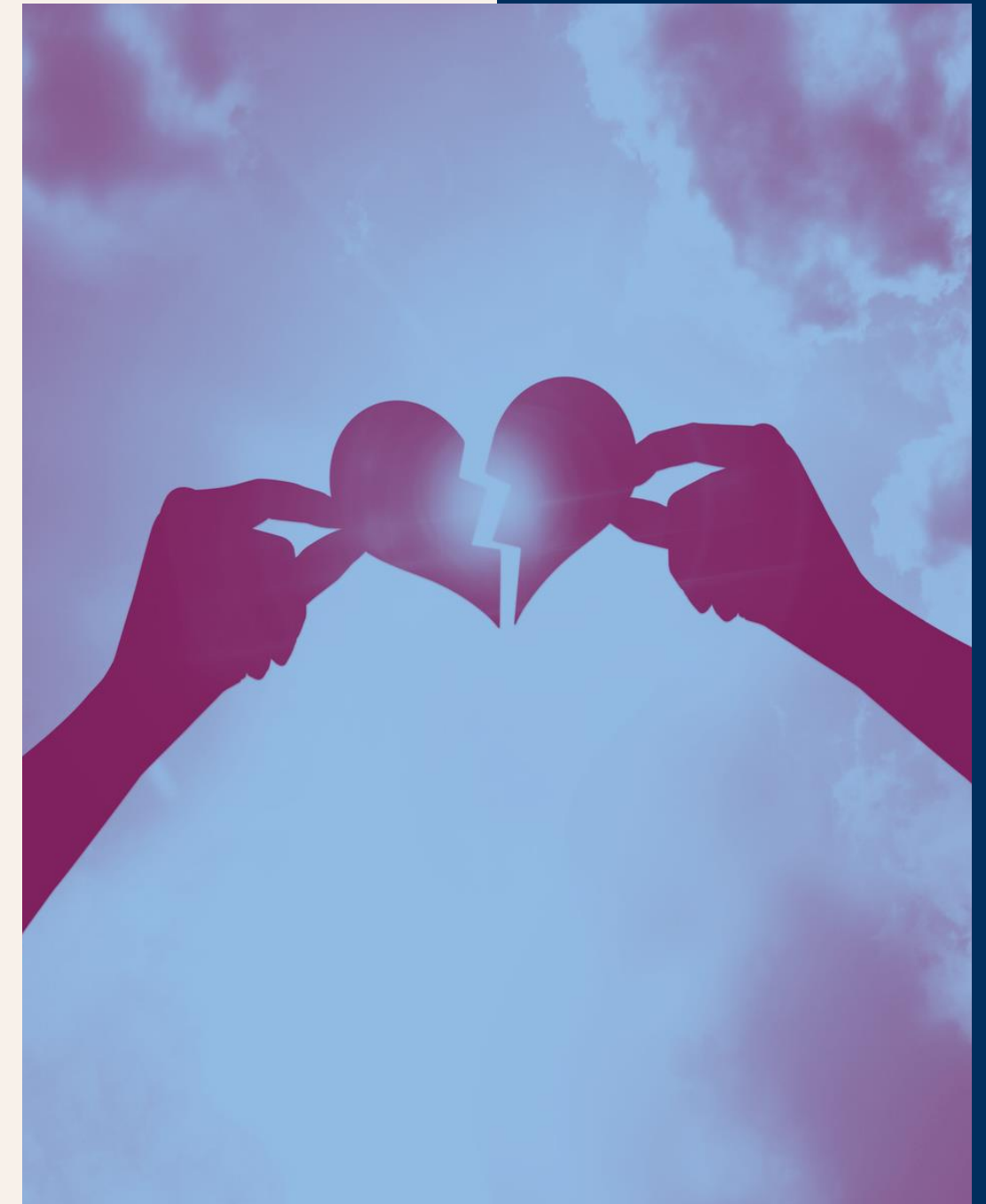
- Person
- Family
- Culture
- Community

Our role is to take a trauma informed approach, keeping an open line of communication.

Asking the right questions in the right way can make all the difference.

## **Educate about rights and laws:**

- They have the right to say no to a marriage or marriage partner they do not want.
- They have the right to leave a marriage they do not want.
- No religion sanctions forced marriage.
- Intercourse is not an obligation and rape and sexual assault CAN occur within a marriage.





QUESTIONS?



# CONTACT US FOR TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE



- \* Receive guidance on intake/assessment protocols to recognize forced marriage within the populations you serve.
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**2024 Tahirih Field Assessment**





# ENHANCE YOUR SCREENING PROCESS

## VICTIMIZATION

Victimization Date\*

☐ Approximate Date?

*Victimization Type:*

☐

Domestic Violence

☐

Sexual Assault

☐

Transnational Abandonment

☐

Forced Marriage

☐

Refused

☐

Unknown

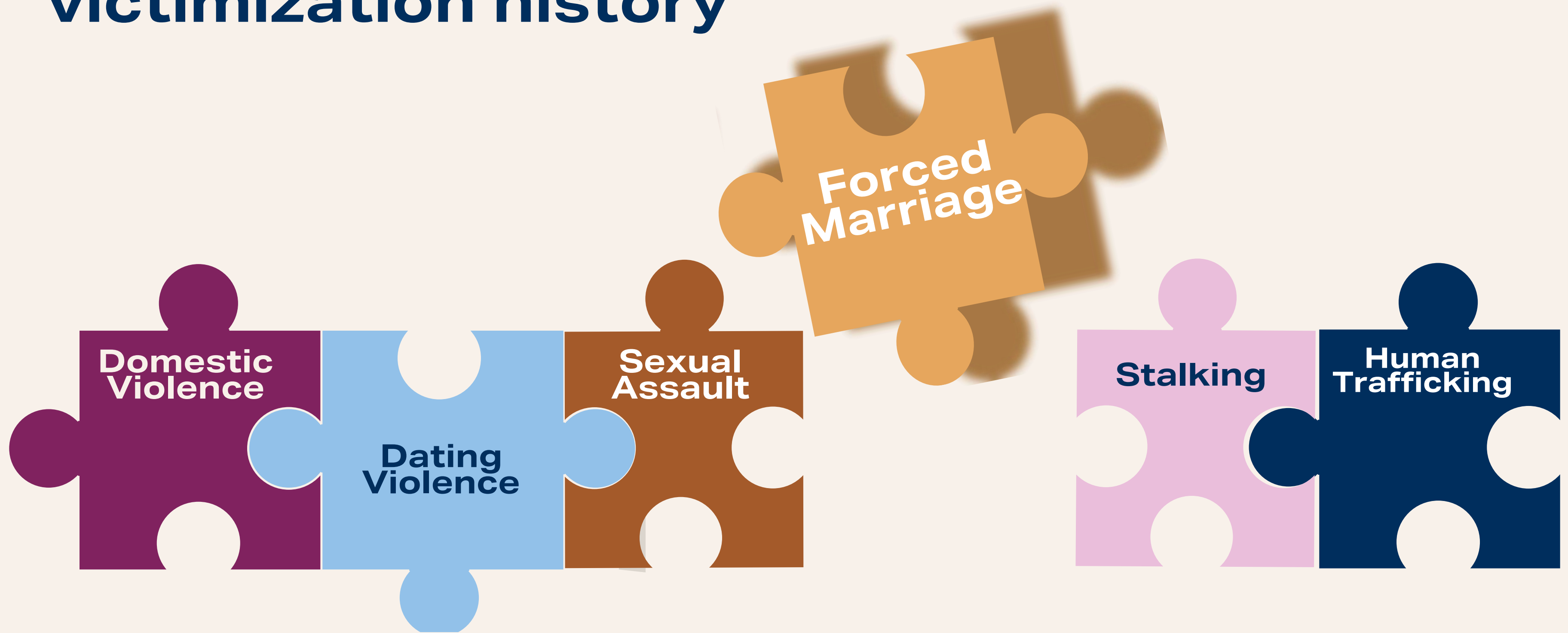
“Before, we did not keep track of forced marriage as a separate victimization type.

Now that we ask about forced marriage, we know we are serving survivors with various needs, multiple perpetrators, who may require special attention.”

**Dr. Nusrat Ameen, Daya**



# Missing a piece of the victimization history



# We are here to help!

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FMI@Tahirih.org  
PreventForcedMarriage.org  
Tahirih.org/ChildMarriage  
571-282-6199

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# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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# CENTRALIZED HELPLINE

**1 (866) 575-0071**

**Monday-Thursday**

**9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.**



→ Determine potential eligibility for immigration relief

→ Identify safety concerns and provide safety planning support

→ Referrals

