



Abducted!

*No girl must ever
simply disappear.*

Information booklet of the
Coordination centre against
abduction and forced marriage

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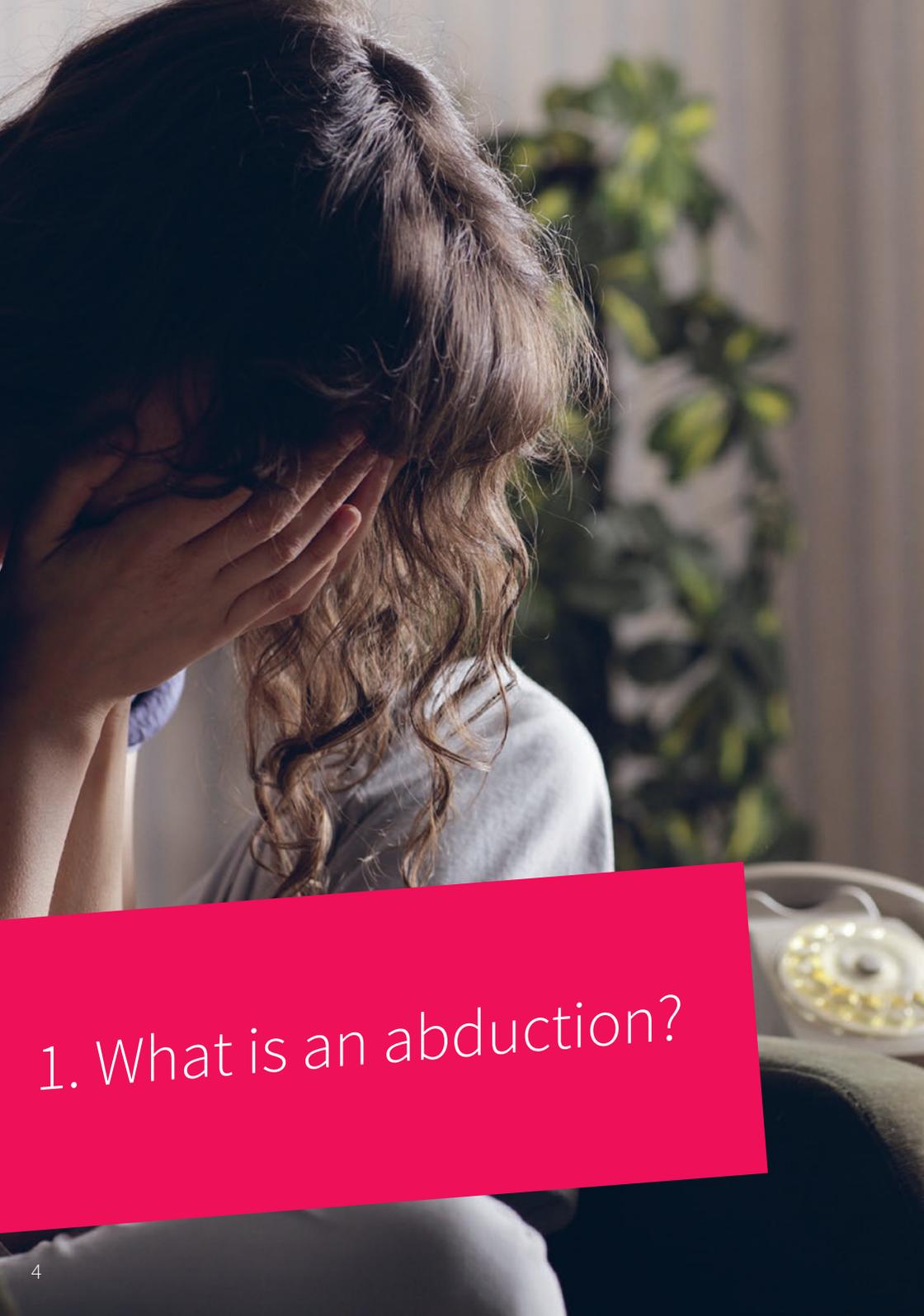
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1. What is an abduction?

1.1. Background

Year after year, and especially during the summer holidays, many girls and young women with a migration background are afraid of travelling with their families to their parents' country of origin. They fear that at the end of the vacation they won't be allowed to return and that they will be left behind to stay with relatives. Very often they cannot share their fears with anyone and very often they do not know whom to turn to for advice. They aren't sure what to do. They hope that everything will be fine and are lured abroad with promises of a holiday or a reunion with beloved family members.

When they do not turn up again, it's possible that no one in Germany queries what has become of them. Sometimes the parents are questioned. Very often they allay suspicion saying that from now on the daughter will live in Pakistan or in Turkey, in Algeria, in Lebanon or in Egypt. Very often everybody is happy with this reply. Between the official departure from one country and the unregistered arrival in another, it is possible for a legal vacuum to appear, a space in between two countries where someone can disappear without a trace and without anyone intervening.

In their parents' country of origin, the young women find they are subject to local ways of life and patriarchal gender roles to an extraordinary extent. Their family will control and isolate them, very often they do not know where they are and sometimes they cannot even speak the language of the country. In a situation like this, unable to escape, they are cut off from all help. Often the girls and young women will then have to give in to the family's wishes and are forcibly married.

It is rare for such girls and young women to successfully manage a return to Europe against the wishes of their families themselves. Helpers and NGOs – both in Germany and locally – find it difficult to find and assist them. Sometimes the calls for help, which kept reaching them via mobile or email, cease after a little while. There is reason to believe that these attempts at establishing contact with an outsider were discovered and that the girls looking for help have been isolated even more strictly, that they have resigned themselves to their fate or – in the worst case – have been killed.

Even if they were to be the victim of an "honour"-killing, given the circumstances, no one would notice and ask questions – let alone trigger an investigation. Outsiders would assume them to be abroad. Family members are either accomplices or think that such an act is justified and thus remain silent.

What are the reasons for an abduction?

As a rule, conflicts between parents and their adolescent daughters will precede an abduction. Depending on the circumstances, these conflicts are acted out more or less openly.

These families usually hold constructs of “family honour” in great esteem. When families fear or actually find out that their daughter has or might have a boyfriend, making her leave for the country of origin can be an easy solution in order to guarantee that such relationships won’t go further. Sometimes insignificant events, such as coming home late or skipping school, will trigger the suspicion that the daughter has sexual contact with boys. In order to solve this “problem”, parents will accept the need to put great stress on the relationship of trust that they have with their child.

Parents often regard their “home country” as unsullied and morally intact and hope that - far away from bad influences - they will be able to return their youngsters to the right path by regaining total control over their children’s behaviour, relationship and life opportunities.

Families have different reasons for leaving daughters in a foreign country:

- ▶ Daughters are to be shielded or cut off from influences in Germany/Europe that are regarded as harmful.
- ▶ Once and for all, they are made to comply with family expectations – especially those relating to traditional gender roles.
- ▶ They are supposed to adapt to the way of life and the way of raising children in the country of origin.
- ▶ The parents intend to strengthen familial bonds with relations in the country of origin.

Who is in danger?

First and foremost, it’s girls who have entered puberty and young women who are in danger of an abduction. This booklet describes the experiences of the centre against abduction in their work with girls and young women, and we focus on this group.

It’s possible that male youths and young men also fall victim to an abduction. This might happen, for example, to young men who do not reflect the heterosexual norm.

Western society is especially blamed for leading to homosexuality. In the family's country of origin the young men are then supposed to be "healed".

However, heterosexual men and youths may also be abducted when they are seen to "go off the rails". In the country of origin they are to be kept away from drugs and a life of crime and shielded from bad company.

These groups may also be victims of forced marriage because their families count on them to become "sensible" once they are responsible for a family of their own. So far, however, hardly anyone from these groups has turned to advice centres for help.

1.2. The relationship between forced marriage and "honour"-based violence

Very little is known about the specific problems relating to abductions, their actual number and the conditions that trigger them.

Current studies on forced marriages in Germany¹ and England² suggest that abduction is an important aspect of forced marriages. As forced marriages are often concluded abroad, in Germany the term "*Heiratsverschleppung*" (abduction for the purposes of marriage) is used.³

If parents plan on forcibly marrying their daughter, they have good reason to believe that once she is abroad she will find it a lot more difficult to resist such plans than if she stayed in Germany. A speedy wedding might seem advised, especially if there is some evidence that the daughter has a boyfriend in Germany and if the parents are afraid of her being talked about, or of her even having pre-marital sexual contacts. They might also wish to make it possible for a family member to join them in Germany. This can also lead to a forced marriage.

Through our work at the coordination centre against abduction we know that not everybody who is left behind against her will in a foreign country has to deal with wedding plans. Often families hope that making the girls stay in an environment – in which they can isolate and control them far more than they ever could do Germany – will discipline them.

1 Mirbach/Schaak/Triebel: Zwangsverheiratung in Deutschland, 2011, p. 100 ff.

2 House of Commons/Home Affairs Committee: Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and "Honour"-Based Violence, 2008, p. 59 ff.

3 Behörde für Arbeit, Soziales, Familie und Integration der Stadt Hamburg: Intervention bei Zwangsverheiratung, 2014, p. 13 ff.

They count on their daughters having no choice but to adapt. In this context abduction can be seen as one aspect of “honour”-based violence. Measures to combat abductions must take into account all parties concerned. They must not make assistance contingent on a forced marriage having taken place, as is the case in some EU countries..

1.3. Redefining the term

There is no hard and fast definition of the term “abduction”. Vice versa, there is no agreement as to what one should call “leaving someone abroad against their will” or “abduction in the context of “honour”-based violence”, as mentioned in the examples above. This makes it difficult for both the girls and women concerned and for their helpers to look for assistance – what search item should one chose, for example, when searching the web?

The coordination centre against abduction and forced marriage defines abduction as a situation when someone is forced by their own family or relatives to stay (behind) in a foreign country. This means that the abductees cannot return to their country of habitual residence. A return is prevented by

- ▶ psychological pressure and/or physical violence
- ▶ total control by the family
- ▶ the abductee finding themselves in a completely dependent and very isolated position, with no contact to the people they know in Germany
- ▶ abductees being deprived of their IDs and travel documents.

In addition, the return may be prevented by the law applicable in the foreign country. It might, for example, not accept the autonomy of youths who are considered to be of age in Germany, or it might limit the right of women to move about freely. This makes return difficult, especially if the parties concerned hold foreign or dual citizenship.

Abduction is a form of “honour”-based violence and constitutes a fundamental violation of the rights of the abductees. For the girls and young women concerned an abduction means

- ▶ they are forced to break with their habitual social environment
- ▶ emotional, psychological and sometimes financial problems and difficult living conditions

- ▶ they are deprived of a social network or educational/vocational opportunities
- ▶ they are cut off from pursuing an educational or vocational career in Germany
- ▶ they are at the mercy of what their family wants for them, for example, as regards a forced marriage
- ▶ they are in a potentially life-threatening situation if they are abducted into crisis regions or war zones.

Literature

- 📄 Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg, Behörde für Arbeit, Soziales, Familie und Integration (2014): Intervention bei Zwangsverheiratung. Möglichkeiten interdisziplinärer Fallzusammenarbeit. Fachveröffentlichung der überbehördlichen Arbeitsgruppe „Zwangsheirat“.
- 📄 House of Commons/Home Affairs Committee (2008): Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and “Honour”-Based Violence. Sixth Report of Session 2007–08.
- 📄 Mirbach, Thomas / Schaak, Torsten / Triebel, Katrin (2014): Zwangsverheiratung in Deutschland. Anzahl und Analyse von Beratungsfällen, Verlag Barbara Budrich.

“First I thought it was just a holiday, but then they took away my passport and my residence permit card... then they bought a medical certificate, so that I can't fly back to Germany without their permission...”

2. Scope of abductions

2.1. Survey of the data

All countries in Europe that have experienced immigration are aware of the problem that parents may resort to abduction to have daughters comply with their notions of how to raise a child properly. Some countries have released studies that allow some conclusions to be drawn as to the number of abductions taking place in the context of “honour”-based violence.

In 2011, the German government published a study on the more than 3,400 cases of forced marriage which advice centres and authorities officially knew of. It stated that more than half of the forced marriages took place abroad or had been planned there. According to the study, the girls and young women concerned seem to be well integrated: 32 per cent of them were born in Germany and 44 per cent hold a German passport. It is obvious, however, that this does not protect them from being forced into marriage. Forty-three per cent of victims are afraid of being abducted and of having to live in a foreign country for good.⁴

In 2014 the British Forced Marriage Unit (FMU), which handles cases of forced marriage, counted 1,267 cases of forced marriage of which 77 per cent had some connection to a foreign country. In 2013, 1,485 cases were reported, 400 cases of which occurred around the summer holidays. The FMU estimates that that during that period four students were taken overseas and forced into marriage every day.⁵ In 2008 the FMU actively assisted 213 (young) women held overseas by rescuing them from a situation where they experienced coercion and/or returning them to Great Britain. Of these cases, 57 per cent related to Pakistan, 13 per cent to Bangladesh and 7 per cent to India.⁶

Norway also collected data on abduction in the context of forced marriages. Between June 2008 and June 2011, 115 cases of abductions of young people were reported. Eighty-seven more youths turned to social workers at schools or specialised embassy staff because they were afraid of being abducted. In these three years, Norwegian embassies helped 35 victims return from overseas.⁷

In the Netherlands there are estimates that there are about eighty cases per year where, after the holidays, husbands leave their wife (sometimes with their

4 Mirbach/Schaak/Triebel: Zwangsverheiratung in Deutschland, 2011, p. 100 f.

5 The Daily Mail, 10.08.2013, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2388445/Pupils-risk-forced-marriage-warned-danger-abducted-families.html#ixzz3jNxlVxwh>

6 Forced Marriage Unit: Forced Marriage Case Handling Guide, 2009, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/35550/fmu-guide-mps.pdf

7 Norwegian Ministry of Immigration and Integration, quoted in Smits van Waesberghe, Eliane / Sportel, Iris / Drost, Lisanne / van Eijk, Esther / Diepenbrock, Elja (2014): 'Zo zijn we niet getrouwd' Een onderzoek naar omvang en aard van huwelijksdwang, achterlating en huwelijksgevangenschap, Verwey Jonker Instituut, p. 40.

children) or parents leave their adolescent children overseas without their passports. Here the countries most often mentioned are Morocco, particularly, but also Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan.⁸

It is safe to assume that the number of unreported cases is high as many abductions go unnoticed.

2.2. Data by Papatya

The figures below throw a spotlight on the impact that abductions have regarding the work done by Papatya from 2012 to 2014. We give percentages and the absolute figures of all cases that came to our attention in which a girl or a young woman had either already been abducted or we had reason to believe that an abduction was imminent. The tables reflect the work done by Papatya, both in the crisis shelter where they can stay for a longer period of time and the counselling done online and via telephone.

Telephone counselling: threatened or completed abductions

	Percentage of counselling on the phone	Number of cases in total	... in connection with marriage	... already abroad
2014	10%	17 Fälle	47%	6%
2013	12%	25 Fälle	48%	4%
2012	12%	32 Fälle	50%	34%

Online counselling: threatened or completed abductions

	Percentage of counselling on the phone	Number of cases in total	... in connection with marriage	... already abroad
2014	17%	15 Fälle	47%	60%
2013	18%	19 Fälle	26%	37%
2012	20%	23 Fälle	52%	35%

8 Smits van Waesberghe, Eliane / Sportel, Iris / Drost, Lisanne / van Eijk, Esther / Diepenbrock, Elja (2014): 'Zo zijn we niet getrouwd' Een onderzoek naar omvang en aard van huwelijksdwang, achterlating en huwelijkse gevangenschap, Verwey Jonker Instituut

Papatya crisis shelter: fear of being abducted

	Percentage of total intake	Number of cases in total	... in connection with marriage
2014	28 %	14 Fälle	43%
2013	30 %	16 Fälle	69%
2012	23 %	13 Fälle	54%

Around a third of the girls taken in by the crisis shelter say that they are afraid of being forcibly abducted to their country of origin. About half of them were to be married against their will. Both helpers and victims contact the counselling services. Abductees who are abroad already hardly ever have the opportunity to draw attention to themselves and so are very dependent on their environment supporting them. Measures to combat abduction and forced marriage must therefore not focus all too one-sidedly on regarding both events as necessarily connected.

These countries/regions have been mentioned during counselling in the context of abductions: Egypt, Albania, Algeria, Bangladesh, Ghana, the Gaza Strip, India, Iraq, Jordan, Kosovo, Libya, Morocco, Macedonia, Pakistan, Senegal, Serbia, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Syria and, most often, Lebanon and Turkey.

In most cases both parents have a migration background. There are, however, also youths from bi-cultural families, where one parent is German.

Literature

-  Forced Marriage Unit: Forced Marriage Case Handling Guide, 2009, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/35550/fmu-guide-mps.pdf
-  Mirbach, Thomas / Schaak, Torsten / Triebel, Katrin (2014): Zwangsverheiratung in Deutschland. Anzahl und Analyse von Beratungsfällen, Verlag Barbara Budrich.
-  Smits van Waesberghe, Eliane / Sportel, Iris / Drost, Lianne / van Eijk, Esther / Diepenbrock, Elja (2014): 'Zo zijn we niet getrouwd' Een onderzoek naar omvang en aard van huwelijksdwang, achterlating en huwelijksgevangenschap, Verwey Jonker Instituut.



3. The coordination centre against abduction and forced marriage

3.1. Initial experiences with abduction in the work of Papatya

As early as 1986, the year the crisis shelter Papatya started, the team was forced to realise that an abduction fundamentally changes the counselling context. During counselling the risk of an abduction taking place must be assessed and taken into account. If there is a risk, it will radically change the situation as a whole. This Papatya had yet to find this out. One girl had to pay for this in the first year of the shelter's existence.

1986: False promises

Right before the holidays start, 15-year-old Berrin⁹ runs away from home. She has been beaten a lot at home for quite some time, but now the family wants to take her on a trip abroad and she is afraid of having to marry her cousin in Turkey. She finds shelter at Papatya and always has someone to accompany her during talks with her parents at the youth welfare office.

The parents insist over and over again that there has been a misunderstanding. They hadn't known that Berrin did not want to get married and assure the youth welfare office in writing that they have given up any marriage plans. Berrin returns home.

After the holidays she is absent from school. After questioning, her parents state that she has decided to stay in Turkey – voluntarily, naturally.

Many years later her cousin is taken in by Papatya and says that Berrin had then been immediately forced into a marriage with her cousin in Turkey.

This case makes the connection between abduction and forced marriage very clear to the Papatya team. It also drives home the message that promises given by parents, be they given orally or in writing, constitute no guarantee whatsoever that a girl's rights will be respected. The team felt that they had let down Berrin and because of this, and because of the fact that there were no ways of assisting girls in a situation like that, they decided, as of then, to question the girls in depth about relatives abroad and to warn girls against going on holidays with their parents, especially shortly after a conflict in the family.

More than twenty years later, another case at the Papatya crisis shelter again made it clear that all attempts at protecting a girl from being abducted can be thwarted very quickly.

9 All names have been changed.

2008: The youth welfare office's right to intervene ends at the German border

Amina, a 14-year-old girl from an Arab-Palestinian family, comes to Papatya in 2008, after yet another beating by her mother. Her father has a girlfriend and is rarely at home. Whenever he is, the parents fight. Amina's mother wants to keep her marriage going at all costs, tries to please her husband and complains about his staying away. The father then often beats her at length. One night Amina becomes aware that he tries to strangle her mother. Since then Amina has had trouble sleeping and keeps waking up in fear. Amina's mother often goes to the neighbours and leaves her in charge of the housework and her four younger siblings. She often thinks that whatever Amina does isn't good enough and then beats her. Now and again she confides in Amina and talks about her marital problems.

Amina's father turns up at the youth welfare office with a man in tow, whom he introduces as an "Arab family helper". He says he will make sure that there won't be any more problems at home – so Amina should come back right away. The youth services do not accept this suggestion, but he has made a favourable impression on them. As a consequence, they insist on a talk with all the family present and a speedy return. Amina's teacher, they say, has stated, that Amina "is going through puberty, but apart from that is always happy."

Under pressure, Amina agrees to a conversation with her father over the phone. She tells him clearly that she does not want to go home and that she doesn't trust his promises that everything will be fine. After all, he is never at home when her mother beats her. She doesn't trust his assurances that this will change in the future.

When Amina meets the youth welfare officer in charge of her case for the first time, the officer immediately pressures Amina to agree on a date for a return to the family. She needs to be reminded that Amina has suffered violence; only then does she ease up somewhat on pushing the girl to return. At the talk with the parents, the father claims that the mother has indeed beaten Amina, but that she knows now that such behaviour isn't good. It wouldn't happen again. The parents state that they are now willing to accept all the assistance offered by the youth welfare office: they are only young and would like to do many things differently. Once Amina understands that she is supposed to return to her family, she starts weeping: she doesn't want violence any longer and she does not want to go back.

At Papatya the team is divided, too: does it make sense to keep on supporting Amina who is still very clear about not wanting to go home? The youth welfare office, which from the very beginning thought Amina's conflicts to be mainly caused by puberty, cannot imagine how they can successfully argue for a change of custody in a guardianship court, especially given the family's ostensibly cooperative stance. It is with mixed feelings that the team supports the youth welfare office's decision to appoint two family helpers of Arab origin, one male and one female (not the ones the father had suggested) in order to intensively support Amina and her siblings in her family. The mother is also to receive assistance this way.

Eventually Amina returns to her family, even though she is reluctant and to the very last refuses to believe that her situation has changed. About ten days later, the family helpers report that on a weekend only a few days after returning Amina was taken away, presumably to Lebanon.

These developments have also taken the youth welfare office completely by surprise. It seems that the whole family has left, with all children. It is unclear which country they are in. Through business partners of Amina's father, the youth welfare office manages to have him contact them via telephone. The officer assigned to her case is able to speak briefly with Amina. She reports that she "woke up in the Czech republic" and that she is now in Lebanon, against her will. It is obvious that Amina cannot speak freely.

After consulting with all the professionals concerned, the youth welfare office petitions the court to remove Amina's parents' custodial rights in absentia. They request the school to report the parents to the police for Amina's absence from school. The court hearing takes place without Amina's parents. The father has his lawyer notify the authorities that the family is on holidays.

The court removes custody and schedules another hearing where Amina is to appear on pain of a penalty. This hearing is attended by the father and his legal counsel. The father states that he wasn't aware that he had to inform the youth welfare office that Amina has travelled voluntarily to a refugee camp near Beirut. He presents a letter of Amina's to this effect. The judge tries to phone Amina and eventually manages to speak with a girl who confirms that she is there voluntarily. The youth welfare office doubts that this was in fact Amina. A search for Amina via the *Internationaler Bund für Sozialarbeit* (international federation of social work) yields no result.

Amina's family ostensibly signalled a willingness to change and compromise and also seemed to accept what they were expected to do. They even asked for help and accepted assistance, but also control by their case managers. After Amina had fled the family they didn't appear aggressive, but very cleverly gauged what the authorities expected from them and acted accordingly. As a consequence, the family were successful in escaping the youth welfare office's measures and thus got what they wanted: abroad Amina is out of reach of any assistance and completely at the mercy of her family. In all likelihood, she has to live in a crisis region and a war zone, while her family in Germany suffers no consequences at all.

There is no way of finding out whether the 14-year-old is fine or whether she still attends school. Intensive individualised support and being able to attend school daily could not prevent Amina's abduction. Young women who have left school and live isolated at home have even fewer opportunities to contact adult persons they trust outside of the family when they are in need.

Amina did not want to go back to her family and did not believe that her situation had changed. Many of the girls and young women taken in by Papatya are unsure whether their families might still come round. They find that their desire for autonomy is irreconcilable with the boundaries set by their families, but are open to believing what they promise them for the future. Even if they are sceptical, they will often give their families "another chance" and return. It is precisely with those girls and young women that one must consider the risk of an abduction. By breaking away they demonstrated that as long as they are in Germany they could leave the family for good and so might render an abduction more likely.

3.2. The coordination centre's history and services

In response to cases such as the ones described above Papatya founded the *Koordinierungsstelle gegen Verschleppung und Zwangsverheiratung* (coordination centre against abduction and forced marriage) in 2013. The *Aktion Mensch* funded 1.5 staff until mid-2016.

Due to its close relationship with the Papatya crisis shelter, the coordination centre can build on years of experience with the psychological dilemmas and dangers that these girls and young women face. The coordination centre also offers individual counselling and can utilise know-how gained through online counselling, which has been offered since 2004.

In spring 2014 *verschleppung.papatya.org* went online, a specialised website dedicated to offering helpful information and the opportunity for anonymous counselling online. It was set up to prevent abductions but also to offer assistance once an abduction has taken place. The website targets two groups: girls and women in danger and their helpers. In the first year the website was accessed 2,431 times.

During the summer of 2014, the campaign “*Verschleppt! Kein Mädchen darf einfach verschwinden*” (Abducted! No girl must ever simply disappear) used posters, postcards and stickers to inform the public of the services offered by the coordination centre. Schools, public institutions, girls’ and women’s organisations, the police and other multipliers received info materials with a view to, on the one hand, reaching girls and young women. On the other hand, it educates potential helpers as to typical problems that appear in an abduction context and informs them of ways of providing assistance. Furthermore, embassies and consulates in the main countries of origin were contacted and informed.

As providing assistance can be very difficult once a girl is abroad, it is of vital importance to take preventative measures **BEFORE** an abduction has taken place. If the girl or young woman has already left the country, the coordination centre will explore what action can be taken in each specific case **WHILE** someone is abroad already and it will try to organise a return. **AFTER** the girl or young woman concerned has re-entered Germany, the coordination centre will assist in developing an adequate coping strategy and advise them on how to become anonymous, find accommodation and gain protection.

Offers for helpers and multipliers

For abductions to become visible at all, the work of the coordination centre is designed to heighten awareness of this issue among the public and especially among people close to potential abductees.

Once abroad, the opportunities for abducted girls and young women to organise help themselves are severely restricted. An environment which is sensitive to the issue of abductions and pays attention can thus be of decisive importance. The coordination centre encourages potential helpers, such as friends and teachers, to not simply accept that a girl has suddenly disappeared. This is more likely when fears have been discussed before the girl has left the country. It is desirable that the authorities are informed of each and every case, and that they react or, at least, question the families about the girls’ whereabouts.

In order to raise awareness among potential multipliers about the dangers associated with “honour”-based violence, we advise them as to networking, further education and how to approach girls and young women directly. The coordination centre’s website also addresses helpers directly. There friends, teachers and other helpers can find information and can contact the coordination centre for advice.

An analysis of the user behaviour on the website found that it is especially helpers who search the Internet for what the coordination centre offers. This conclusion is based on the high click-rate on the page “How to offer support”, in conjunction with the long time spent on the page and the low dropout rate.

Offers for girls and young women potentially or currently in danger

How to prevent an abduction

The coordination centre’s work focuses on preventing abductions and addresses potential abductees by offering information about the opportunity of receiving anonymous telephone or online counselling. Even though many will find it hard to resist their families’ plans for the holidays, for example, it is important to raise awareness that they might be at risk of being abducted.

The refusal to travel abroad with their families might give rise to massive conflicts. Many girls and young women shy away from open conflicts with their parents: they do this even more so, the more their families tend to use pressure and violence in daily life in order to enforce what they think is right. Some “white lies” girls and young women can use to prevent going abroad might be falling sick, appointments with the authorities or pressing obligations related to their vocational training. Maybe, however, they will have no choice but to flee their families. Even at the very last moment when about to cross the border girls can ask the border police for help. It is very important that potential abductees are aware of this last resort and that they know that there are facilities they can find refuge in.

If, despite being warned over and over again, girls are about to leave the country, they - if afraid of being forced into marriage and/or of being left behind - should at the very least and, if possible in writing, leave behind some information related to their fears, such as their destination abroad, their scheduled return date and what steps helpers should take if they are not to return home.

The website would like to play a role in having the girls reflect on potential risks before they depart and it would also like to make them understand that we are aware of their ambivalent feelings. It should show that we understand how difficult the situation is that they girls find themselves in.

The coordination centre's most basic advice is: whoever is afraid of being left behind in a foreign country should do their utmost not to leave Germany and to inform the people close to them. We are very clear in pointing out that once they are abroad, getting help is difficult and even sometimes impossible.

In order to allow users to navigate the website in the safest way possible, we provide an emergency exit button which takes them directly to an inconspicuous website. The website also informs users in an easy-to-understand manner of ways and means of surfing the web anonymously.

Assistance if an abduction has taken place

Once abductees are abroad, the Internet becomes very important for them. Very often it is their only opportunity to contact the outside world. Girls abroad depend on this lifeline, even more than girls supervised and locked up in Germany.

The abductees contact and communicate with us across borders and they always do so under difficult circumstances. When the girls and young women contact us from abroad, their opportunities to do so are very limited. Often they will use a smartphone that they were able to hide from their families. Sometimes they manage to use a computer to access the Internet. They have to make use of moments when they are not supervised and very often they will have very little time. As they cannot know how conscientiously and responsibly the coordination centre deals with their data, they have to trust us implicitly. Each and every one of their attempts to contact us might be discovered and thus carries the risk of the situation escalating further and possibly permanent isolation: their mobile phone might be taken away and they might be taken to a different location, for example, a village without access to the Internet.

As very often the initial attempts to contact us don't provide essential information which the coordination centre needs in order to plan how to proceed, the website offers a contact form. This elicits the most important data and makes contacting us easier: all self-reporting girls who contacted the coordination centre from abroad in 2015 used the form. The easy-to-use form provides set questions and typical answers and thus saves abductees the effort of thinking about how to express themselves. The form allows the coordination centre to elicit initial important information.

These are the questions we ask:

- ▶ Where are you? In which country, which city?
- ▶ How long have you been abroad?
- ▶ How old are you?
- ▶ Do you have a passport with you? From which country?
- ▶ No German passport: what kind of residence permit do you have in Germany?
- ▶ What school do you go to? What is your job?
- ▶ Are you supposed to marry or have you been married to someone?
- ▶ Do you have any support in Germany? Does anybody know about your situation?

The answers allow us to carry out an initial evaluation of the situation and they will kick-start more in-depth research about what can be done. We find it a problem that we cannot quickly and easily get the abductee's consent to handing over her data to the authorities; such a handover, however, should not take place without express consent. The situation of abductees may unintentionally be further aggravated by quick and thoughtless activities, which, for example, might lead the family to think that inquiries made by the authorities were caused by their daughter asking for help.

“Now she is in Egypt. She tried it once at the embassy, but they couldn't help her there, either. She could get a hold of her passport: she knows where her father has hidden it. As far as she knows, the father has forbidden her to take a plane, which has made her even more desperate.”

Schick uns jetzt deine Infos!

Um einen Ausweg zu finden, müssen wir genau Bescheid wissen! Fülle die unten stehenden Fragen aus, wir setzen uns so bald wie möglich, jedenfalls innerhalb von 72 Stunden, mit dir in Verbindung.

Wo bist du? In welchem Land, welcher Stadt?

z.B.: Türkei, Diyarbakir oder Libanon, Beirut

Seit wann bist du im Ausland?

z.B.: seit 2 Wochen

Wie alt bist du?

z.B.: 17 Jahre

Hast du einen Pass bei dir? Von welchem Land?

z.B.: Ich habe einen deutschen Pass.

Kein deutscher Pass: Welchen Aufenthalt hast du in Deutschland?

z.B.: Ich habe einen türkischen Pass, in Deutschland habe ich eine unbefristete Aufenthaltserlaubnis

Was machst du schulisch oder beruflich?

z.B.: Ich bin Schülerin in der 9. Klasse am Goethe-Gymnasium in Köln

Sollst du verheiratet werden oder bist du es schon?

z.B.: Ich habe erfahren, dass ich in 2 Monaten an einen Bekannten der Familie verheiratet werden soll.

Hilft dir jemand in Deutschland? Weiß jemand über deine Situation Bescheid? Wer?

z.B.: Ich habe meinem Vertrauenslehrer an meiner Schule vor den Sommerferien von meinen Befürchtungen erzählt. Sein Name ist Herr Schulz.

Kommentar

E-Mail *

Gib hier deine E-Mail-Adresse an, damit wir dich kontaktieren können. Stelle sicher, dass niemand anderes Zugriff auf dein E-Mail-Konto hat.

Name

► Absenden

4. Online counselling across borders



4.1. Case studies

These case studies illustrate the potential of online-counselling across borders but also its limits once an abduction has taken place.

Case study 1: Four months of counselling a young adult in Iraq

Rabia contacts a large German newspaper for help, which then facilitates contact with the coordination centre. The young woman, born in Iraq, is a German citizen. Some time ago, she fell in love and was planning on marrying a young man.

“When my parents found out, they beat me a lot, they tied me up, spat at me and insulted me and did many things that you cannot even imagine in your dreams. Now my parents have forced me to come to Iraq. They threatened me and said that if I don’t come voluntarily, they would do something to my boyfriend.”

In Iraq, they take away her passport and all other documents that could establish her identity, such as her bank card. She writes:

“Actually I am a student at a university in Germany. Now I am here in Iraq and my parents have forced me to come here! I have tried to kill myself twice. I want to go back to Germany. To my boyfriend and my real home! PLEASE HELP ME! I can only answer via email. My parents have also taken away my mobile phones so I cannot contact anyone. Only when my relations are not at home can I quickly get to the laptop and see whether I have got an answer.”

The counsellor initially asks Rabia a lot of questions in order to get a better understanding of her life and family situation in Berlin and Iraq. At the same time, she tries to find out whether Rabia could somehow influence her parents to change their mind. She warns her against leaving traces on the laptop and gives her the contact details of a women’s organisation in Iraq and the German representatives where she lives. Rabia replies immediately:

“I have been trying all the time to make my parents change their mind but it doesn’t work! They want to

stay here. I have a government grant to study, but I think even an official request for an appointment by the grant office wouldn't work because my parents don't care at all. I told them if I am not back in Germany this week I will be kicked out of uni. They said they don't care at all! I cannot go to X (city in Iraq) because I don't even get money from my parents to get there in a taxi. (...) I mustn't leave the house or anything like that but I am a prisoner at home, which means at my grandparents!"

The counsellor asks her whether she is allowed to hand over her data to other institutions in Germany in order to organise help. She asks Rabia to be patient and tries to raise her spirits. Rabia gives her approximate address in Iraq and writes:

"Thank you for your encouraging words and the help! (...) there are some moments when I can get out and then go to the consulate but the problem is, if I go there then I cannot go back and my parents mustn't find me either because this would mean death for me! (...) I am fine with everything you do: the most important thing is that I get away from here!"

Rabia's counsellor now involves other institutions in Germany which contact the Consulate General and a NGO in Iraq. They are informed about Rabia. The counsellor keeps Rabia informed about all steps taken. Rabia is unsure whether she can trust the NGO.

Then all contact ceases. The counsellor manages to find out that Rabia contacted the Iraqi NGO and was asked for her number. Nothing more is known. She tries to reach Rabia via email while organising help in Iraq.

A week later Rabia replies via email: she is fine but has no more access to the Internet. She is now in contact with the German consulate. She then asks that an institution in Germany should formally request her attendance – she believes that this might move her father to let her go after all. She doesn't know where she is, the family has moved.

A little later she writes that the consulate has provided her with documents attesting to her identity and is willing to buy a plane ticket for her:

“(...) but I am very afraid really very afraid that when they find me this will mean I am dead anyway! Or that they do something bad to the family of my boyfriend ... and something like that is possible here. I am afraid!”

The counsellor makes her the offer that once Rabia is back she can either stay at Papatya or in a women’s shelter in a different city and then organise all further steps from there. She explains to Rabia how she can try to protect her boyfriend and his family and keeps on encouraging her.

Four weeks later Rabia is back in Germany and manages to get in touch. The family had found out about her correspondence with the centre. The consulate, however, had already reported the family to the police and the local police had summoned the family for a hearing. At the same time, a relative had supported Rabia and the German study grant office issued a formal request for Rabia to attend a meeting. All this had led to the father agreeing to Rabia leaving for Germany in order put her things in order. Rabia hopes that her relative can convince her father to let her finish her studies in Germany. She does not want to go to a shelter.

A little later, her last message:

“I am back in Germany and I am fine. I also still live at home. My family and I have come to an agreement: I can stay in Germany, thank God :) Thank you for helping me so much and for always encouraging me :) This is what you need in moments like those :) Thank you very much!”

In this case counselling has made a young woman stronger, a woman who is obviously very glad that the situation did not end in a complete break with her family. The fact that her contacting us had been discovered could have led to far more serious consequences for Rabia. What really happened and what impact the threats had had, is hard to guess - as such the case is typical for the vagaries that one has to deal with in cases of abduction.



Case study 2: Two sisters manage to return home

A friend of the nineteen and twenty-year-old sisters contacts the coordination centre by phone. She says that a pregnant cousin of theirs had asked them to accompany her to Turkey. They wanted to be back after a week. Once they had arrived in the family's village it turned out that the request had been a trick to get the young women abroad. On arrival their father took away their passports and mobile phones and told them that they were to stay in Turkey.

The friend helps the coordination centre to get in touch with the school that the two young women attend. Both had already run away from home once before, but returned after a short while in response to promises made by their parents.

The coordination centre's counsellor manages to get the number of the mobile phone of one of the sisters through a teacher. She actually succeeds in contacting her. Calling the young woman also means risking that the situation escalates further. The coordination centre's phone number is suppressed but her family might still check the young woman's phone. An unknown caller could immediately trigger allegations that she has a boyfriend. Had a family member picked up the phone, the counsellor would have apologised saying that she had dialled the wrong number.

The young woman confirms that they were left with their grandparents against their will. Their cousin, an independent, well-educated woman, working at a German public authority, whom they had trusted implicitly, had lured them into a trap. The family is working hard at separating her from her sister, but both are resisting as much as possible. They have no money and aren't sure about the exact address of where they are staying. Both state that they are willing to leave their family if the counsellor managed to direct the Turkish police to where they are being held.

At the same time the young women's school calls their mother in for a meeting. She claims that both sisters want to stay in Turkey of their own free will. In the meantime, another of their fellow students has received a text message asking for help.

The youth welfare officer of the school informs the child benefit fund and the job centre. According to their documents - copies of the passports - both sisters are Turkish citizens. One sister has a limited residence permit for Germany, the other's is unlimited.

The coordination centre gets a local women's organisation involved, as they cannot reach the women's crisis shelter closest to the girls by phone. The centre and the women's organisation jointly prepare a police intervention. As both sisters are of age, the women's organisation would also be willing to collect them by car at a designated meeting point.

The girls are reminded not to talk about their escape plans with anyone and are told - in case the police turned up - to state very clearly that they are being held against their will. The coordination centre declares its willingness to bear the costs of their return to Germany upfront. It advises the sisters to comply with what is requested of them as much as possible and to not lose patience. When they are able to pinpoint their exact location, the police are called into action.

A little later the girls contact the coordination centre: the police had taken them away for a short while; their grandfather, however, had stayed with them all the time. The police officers are friends of their grandfather's and on his side, and this is why they are now again at an aunt's.

Meanwhile, the local women's organisation is informed by the police that the sisters did not want help and decided against going to the women's crisis shelter and in favour of returning to their family. They were given the telephone number of the police, in case they decided to flee later. On the phone the girls deny they were ever given such a number. Again they have to fight against being separated.

Again the coordination centre alerts the local women's organisation. The colleague there faxes the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in Ankara - people there eventually get the local police to drive to the family again. At the same time, there is a flurry of activity amongst the family in Berlin, as the young women report later. The mother sets out to go to Turkey. One of the sisters is shown her passport and promised that she can return to Germany. She then decides to stay with the family. The police take the other sister to the women's shelter, while the family curse her and say they don't want to have her any longer anyway.

The coordination centre contacts the women's shelter. There they help the young woman apply for a new passport, only then can they start organising the plane ticket home.

In the meantime, the mother has arrived in Turkey and insists strongly on being allowed to speak with her daughter in the women's shelter. She offers to take her with her to Berlin but also threatens her daughter that she will be cast out if she doesn't go with her. The daughter would like to accept the offer and can scarcely be convinced to stay in the shelter until the actual day of departure. At the request of the coordination centre the colleague at the women's shelter has the mother show evidence of the passports and the plane tickets to Germany.

At the same time, the coordination centre contacts the state office of criminal investigation in Germany, which phones the father and informs him that the authorities are aware of the abduction. The father claims that the daughters were disobedient and skipped school, so he only wanted to leave them in Turkey for one to two months to make them see reason.

At the women's advice centre in Turkey the mother shows the passports and tickets. She reports that she is in trouble now with her relatives as everyone now knows how disobedient her daughters are.

Six weeks after first contacting their friend the sisters are finally back in Berlin and attending school. A counsellor at the coordination centre schedules a final meeting with them on the school's premises. Only one sister turns up, the other one is sick. The young woman reports that there had been conflicts with their father for quite a while as he thinks they are too modern and "too German". At home the abduction isn't talked about at all, everything is kept under wraps, but her father warned them that he would kill them the next time they broke the rules. Despite all this, she wants to stay at home: she feels sorry for her family and her father knows many people. In order to be safe she would have to leave Berlin. She thanks us a lot for helping her to come back.

In this case also the sisters are relieved to have ultimately avoided breaking with their family. It is hard to assess whether the agreement reached with their family will hold – one can only hope that the pressure exerted by the authorities has a long-lasting effect. The manner in which the Turkish police operated is questionable. It is likely that had the local women's advice centre not kept up the pressure, no help would have been forthcoming. Had the sisters been separated and been taken to the village, it's unlikely that they would have been traced.

As a rule, the girls who contact us want to go back to Germany and to their old life – they do not want to break with their families. They are all the more relieved about any solution which enables them to do one without having to go through with the

other. It's possible that because they received assistance they feel empowered so that they are confident about resisting again should it become necessary again. The parents are also aware that they might have to deal with questions again.

However, it is not always possible to avoid a complete break and sometimes it is also completely obvious to the young women themselves that they will only be able to achieve what they want in life if they leave their families. If they cannot imagine such a break when they have to take the decision, any attempts at supporting them – difficult as they are, anyway – will reach their limits.

Every case is unique: again and again we need to explore what is possible.

Case study 3: No way back

Naina is 17 years old and was referred from western Germany to Papatya in Berlin. Many years ago her parents moved from Pakistan to Germany. When still a child, Naina was left with her grandmother in Pakistan for quite some time in order to grow up in accordance with traditional Pakistani values and customs. She holds Pakistani citizenship. Naina's father commutes between Germany and Pakistan where he is a high-ranking politician.

At Papatya Naina talks about beatings, being forced to stay at home and permanent monitoring by her parents. After her parents find out that Naina secretly has a boyfriend with a Pakistani background, they immediately book a flight to Pakistan. Naina was afraid that once there she would be forced into a marriage or killed and this is why she fled. The youth welfare office initially houses her in a city close to where she used to live. After a relative attempts to kidnap her, she is sent to Berlin for protection.

Like all girls who are taken in by Papatya, she has to promise that she will keep the address a secret. A member of the crisis shelter team catches her as she has her boyfriend drop her off at the door. As a consequence she is moved to another institution, having spent two weeks at Papatya.

Three weeks after Naina's departure, a friend contacts us: Naina has returned to her parents and is now stuck in Pakistan. She is to be forced into marriage.

Upon request the youth welfare office reports that it's probable that Naina's boyfriend has persuaded her to return to her parents to wait for a wedding with him there. The boyfriend's father is a business partner of Naina's influential father.

Shortly before leaving Germany she attends a counselling session at the youth welfare office. There she is strongly advised against flying to Pakistan. The youth welfare officer thinks her to be at a high risk of being murdered in Pakistan, as her father could also pay criminals. As Naina has been summoned to appear in front of a court in Germany for a theft she is alleged to have committed, the youth welfare office is hoping for her return.

Terre des Femmes and the coordination centre liaise with a women's organisation active in Pakistan. They manage to establish contact with Naina who reports that she is to marry a cousin of hers. The women's organisation is willing to offer Naina temporary refuge in Pakistan and to organise a plane ticket. After her return, the youth welfare office in Germany is willing to support her further. Despite repeated demands, Naina does not contact Terre des Femmes or the coordination centre herself.

Afterwards Naina cancels several meetings to flee at short notice and once she does not turn up at the agreed time. Keeping in contact with her grows dangerous for the women's organisations involved, after they receive a threatening email – presumably from a relation of Naina's.

The youth welfare office is heard at court because of the theft report. It attempts to use the opportunity to discuss the fact that Naina is not attending the hearing. Her father is present and declares that Naina attends school in Pakistan, that she is happy there and removed from the harmful influence of the German youth welfare office. A little later the youth welfare office receives an email written by Naina confirming what her father had said. We assume that this message was written under pressure.

After this, there is no more contact.

Case study 4: Giving up

It is easy to understand that many young women hope that they can resolve conflicts without breaking with their families. Unfortunately this means that they will always have to accept some risk and sometimes the outcomes of their decisions cannot be undone. This is why we chose to end these case studies with a young woman's urgent appeal to the girls at Papatya:

"Its me, Lamis, the 1 from Berlin, the 1 who already was 2 times with you How R U? i am really f***d

When i got the flat in Y evrything was great i had a great job & friends and after 3 yrs I thought Y not phone Mum and Dad? After a couple calls with them i visited them almost evry weeknd and they visit me & i thought things cant be better after 1 yr Mum asked do i wanna go with them to Lebanon i thought about it 4 a long time and sayd yes. evrything was great I live alone and i see my family evry weeknd i thought they have changed...

I flew with Mum to Lebanon & now i am here alone 4 3 yrs with my aunt & i have to wear the stupid headscarf 3 weeks ago I get a phone again 4 the first time Y? because I get Married & i must speak with my fiance the guy i marry is 17 yrs older Than me... & they dont care that i am no virgin there is something i put in me on my wedding night then there is blood... I dont write because i want help i have accepted it but i wanna tell the girls who are with U no matter how nice yr family is after U come back there is always a problm actualy wanna protect the honour learn from my mistakes i hope U will have more luck than i...The only thing i hope is that the guy i marry who is 43 yrs old is a good guy that is my only Hope and i can go back to Germany... And believe me the first chance i get i will go away from here my wedding is in summer & he wanna live in Germany on the day my feet are on German ground again U can know that i am 1 step closer 2 my freedom i will try not 2 get pregnant by this guy

All my love i miss U all

keep your fingers crossed i will keep U posted”

4.2. Counselling strategies between compliance and attack

In order to make a return to Germany more likely, we have to find the right balance between keeping quiet – and this also means keeping a low public profile – and confronting the families. It’s important for the young women that they know they won’t be left alone. They need to be encouraged to keep going and they need emotional support. Often they adopt a strategy of pretending to comply, which can indeed be rather successful. Once the parents have the impression that they “have come to their senses” and have learnt their lesson, they might allow them to return to Germany. This strategy often works because there are usually plans in place anyway that they should later live with the husband they (were forced to) wed in Germany. This strategy is bound to fail if the family discovers that their daughter has been looking for ways of escaping her situation.

Hand in hand with this accommodation strategy, it can make sense to exert pressure by involving German authorities in a way which does not allow the family to trace their interference back to their daughter as she tries to escape.

On the other hand, it is almost impossible to pursue an accommodation strategy when local authorities want to speak with the daughter, when the police turn up at the family and ask for the daughter or when local support organisations are contacted. As a consequence, the abductee must be informed about any such undertaking and must agree to it. If she chooses this path, she must be aware of the fact that - at least for the time being – there is no way back and that she might be in even more danger temporarily. Without the input of cooperating NGOs in this matter, it is almost impossible to guess how authorities abroad will act; their activities might not always lead to the desired outcome.

The coordination centre can assist in providing documents that prove residence in Germany which can be submitted to the German consulates abroad. It can also give information on local organisations which can offer help abroad – if there are any - and contact them and the German consulate in charge. If a girl or young woman returns to Germany, the coordination centre can arrange for her to be taken in by Papatya or another suitable shelter.

4.3. Challenges in counselling

It is typical of abductions that they are, on the one hand, very complex and that they cut across several fields of law. On the other hand, it is extremely difficult to collect reliable data and to understand what the abductee actually wants.

Online counselling has its own challenges (establishing rapport and trust with limited contacts, little feedback/dialogues limited in scope and lacking face-to-face information, time-delayed counselling, its non-binding character). This is often exacerbated by abductees' often ambivalent feelings, the fact that their situation is potentially dangerous, and that everything happens abroad.

If the girls or young women hold dual citizenship or a non-German citizenship, this will drastically limit the assistance we can provide. It is hard to understand the influence that abductees' families have on local authorities and the way in which they are connected. It is also difficult to gauge the trustworthiness of local NGOs, if they exist at all, if we have had no previous contacts or experience with them.

Any attempt at contacting an abductee can endanger her even further; at the same time it is necessary to collaborate closely with her. The contact can cease any minute: maybe someone finds out about it, maybe the mobile phone she hid runs out of power, or the cousin who secretly loaned her phone before is not around any longer.

As it is unclear where they can find help, some abductees try to come to the attention of many people/organisations hoping that someone somewhere will heed their call for help. Contacting several support organisations, however, can lead to confusion – especially if they do not know about the others and approach the authorities separately.

Public institutions are often not allowed to pass on information, such as an abductee's registered place of residence, to the coordination centre - an NGO - because of data protection regulations. If this is the case, all that we can do is establish a direct link between the authorities in Germany and the consulates abroad.

In the context of abductions it is almost impossible to establish routine procedures. In each and every case it is necessary to be creative and to explore which kind of support is possible and sensible.

Often it is not possible to find out what happens after we have provided assistance. Again and again the contact suddenly ceases and we can only guess as to the reason why. This also makes it difficult for counsellors to find closure. In such a case the helplessness they experience further exacerbates their psychological stress.

“Unfortunately, my Dad has all my documents and I cannot get to them at all. Also, my uncle works at the consulate, so I have no chance at all of getting help from them. I also can’t leave the house, my father is very well known here.”





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abduction and forced marriage



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