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Breaking the Silence: Global Study to Expose the Hidden Harm of Mandated Religious Shunning

A groundbreaking international research project has launched to document and quantify the devastating human cost of mandated religious shunning—a coercive practice affecting an estimated 40 million people worldwide. This pioneering study will provide critical data to inform policy decisions and raise global awareness about how mandated shunning violates basic human rights.

The Open Minds Foundation, a global nonprofit dedicated to combating coercive control, has partnered with the University of Roehampton, UK, to spearhead this comprehensive investigation.

What is Mandated Shunning?

Mandated shunning occurs when high-control religious or ideological groups enforce social isolation against members they consider disobedient or non-conforming. Members are ordered to cut off contact with friends, family, or loved ones—often with devastating emotional, social, and economic consequences.

Despite its severe impact, mandated shunning remains under-researched. This study seeks to fill that gap by gathering empirical data on its psychological, social, and legal implications.

Research Scope and Objectives

Led by Dr. Windy Grendele and Dr. Savin Bapir-Tardy from the University of Roehampton's School of Psychology, the study will combine qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore mandated shunning's far-reaching effects. The research will document mental health challenges such as PTSD, anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicidal ideation among those affected.

The study also aims to examine the experiences of individuals forced to shun loved ones and the threats faced by whistleblowers reporting crimes like child sexual abuse within these communities.

Key Focus Groups

Targeted communities for the research include, but are not limited to:

- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Scientologists
- Haredi Jews
- Exclusive Brethren
- Amish/Mennonites
- Bahá'í Faith

Together, these groups account for tens of millions of individuals directly or indirectly affected by mandated shunning.

A Call for Global Collaboration

"Our interdisciplinary approach will combine psychological and legal perspectives, aiming to create a clearer understanding of the societal and individual toll of mandated shunning," said Dr. Grendele. "We invite individuals who have experienced mandated shunning to share their stories confidentially. Participation is entirely voluntary, and personal identities will be protected at all times."

Victoria Petkovic-Short, Executive Director of the Open Minds Foundation, expressed hope that the study will drive meaningful change:

"We aim to unite experts, survivors, advocates, and policymakers from around the world in a common mission: to end the use of mandated shunning as a tool of coercion and control. This study will shine a spotlight on the profound harm caused by this abusive practice and inspire global action to protect human rights."

How to Support or Participate

The three-year research project has an estimated cost of £225,000 (\$300,000). To learn more about participating or supporting this vital initiative, please visit stopmandatedshunning.org.