

Practice briefing

Identifying and engaging with young people at risk of forced marriage

This guidance will support Young People's Violence Advisors (YPVAs) and other professionals working with young people to improve early identification and to safeguard young people at risk of forced marriage. You might also find it helpful to refer to our quick guide to identifying and engaging with young people at risk of forced marriage.¹

This practice briefing will help you in your practice by exploring the following issues:

- What is forced marriage?
- Warning signs and risk-aggravating factors
- Risk assessment
- Best practice and safety planning
- Useful links

What is forced marriage?

'A forced marriage is a marriage in which one or both spouses do not (or in the case of some adults with learning or physical disabilities, cannot) consent to the marriage and duress is involved. Duress can include physical, psychological, financial, sexual and emotional pressure.'
(HM Government, 2009)

In 2012 alone, the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) provided advice and support to 1,485 possible forced marriage cases. It is understood that forced marriage is still underreported and the scale of the problem is likely to be much greater.

There is a clear distinction between an arranged and forced marriage. An arranged marriage is entered freely by both parties, although their families take a leading role in the choice of the partner. It becomes a forced marriage when there is any form of duress.

Forced marriage is a violation of human rights in itself, because it deprives victims of the ability to choose their own partner and to make basic decisions about their lives. It may also lead to other violations of human rights, including imprisonment, rape, domestic abuse and forced pregnancy. Many of the trigger factors are the same as for other forms of 'honour'-based violence. Forced marriage is a form of abuse and should be treated as such. Cases should be tackled using existing structures, policies and procedures designed to safeguard children and victims of domestic abuse.

Who is affected by forced marriage?

Every year, hundreds of young people in Britain, both male and female, are forced into marriage against their will, often as a result of extreme violence and blackmail from their own families and relatives. In 2012, the majority of cases were female (82% of victims) and 18% of cases involved male victims (FMU, 2013). A large proportion of people affected by forced marriage come from the Middle East, South Asia, East Asia and Africa.

Working with young people

¹ Visit www.safelives.org.uk/documents/forced_marriage_quick_guide.pdf

In 2012, 13% of cases involved victims under 15 years old and 22% of the victims were 16-17 years old (FMU) which indicates that this issue disproportionately affects young people.² They engage with services in a different way to adults and you may need to adapt working practices to retain a meaningful contact. Young people may have fluid relationships and specific preferences for communicating – such as texting - as well as different priorities to adult clients. For practical advice on working with young people affected by relationship abuse, see SAFELIVES's 'Practice Briefing for IDVAs: working with young people experiencing relationship abuse' (2013).

Warning signs and risk-aggravating factors

Identifying warning signs

Practitioners need to be alert to warning signs and consider whether forced marriage is a possible threat. Young people at risk may display one or more warning signs. As each individual warning sign alone may not indicate a risk of forced marriage, it is important that you use professional judgment and seek support through a trained professional and/or a specialist service where you think forced marriage is a risk. Warning signs include:

- History of forced marriage in the family.
- Not being allowed to leave the house.
- Attempts to run away from home.
- Constant monitoring by the family.
- Request for extended leave of absence at school and/or failure to return from the country of origin after holidays.
- Surveillance by siblings or family members who are in the same school.
- Fear about forthcoming school holidays.
- Being withdrawn from school or prevented from continuing with higher education.
- Not engaging in school activities.
- More frequent absence from school for longer periods of time.
- Hyper-vigilance by the young person.
- Attempted suicide or suicidal tendencies.

Risk-aggravating factors

Certain behaviours that are socially acceptable in some cultures can be perceived as inappropriate and violating the family's 'honour' in other cultures. Those behaviours can increase the risk of forced marriage for young people.

- Pregnancy.
- Loss of virginity.
- Smoking or drinking in public.
- School informing the family of poor performance or attendance.
- Being the source of community / family gossip.
- Having a boyfriend.
- Make up or clothes perceived as inappropriate.
- Dating someone outside the community or not from the same religion.
- Talking to a stranger.
- Intimacy in public place.
- Disclosure of rape or sexual abuse.
- Sexual orientation (lesbian/gay/bisexual or transgender) or behaviour indicating the young person is not heterosexual.

Social isolation

There are many barriers that will stop the young person from seeking help. They may be frightened of a range of people, including both, male and female relatives, as well as others from the wider community and they may find it extremely difficult to trust anyone. As a result, social isolation becomes one of the biggest problems for the young people at risk of forced marriage.

The family's motives for forced marriage depend on individual circumstances and can include:

- Controlling unwanted behaviours and sexuality, particularly of women, and preventing 'unsuitable' relationships.
- Upholding the family's honour or long-standing commitments.
- Protecting perceived cultural or religious ideals.
- Attempting to strengthen family links.
- Ensuring wealth and land remains within the family.
- Assisting claims for residence and citizenship.
- Providing a carer for a disabled family member / to reduce the 'stigma' of disability.

² Where the age was known, 30% of incidents involved victims aged 18-21, 19% involved victims aged 22-25, 8% victims aged 26-30 and 8% involved aged 31+ (FMU, 2013).

Risk assessment

The **SafeLives Domestic Abuse, Stalking and 'Honour'-Based Violence (DASH) Risk Identification Checklist (RIC) - Young People's Version** is available to address the evidence-based risk factors associated with violence and domestic abuse. The Young People's Checklist includes specific questions and guidance relating to threats from the extended family. The Checklist allows professionals to assess the level of risk the young person is at and refer them to relevant agencies or to the MARAC.

With all risk assessment procedures, a practitioner's professional judgement is crucial. You should listen to the young person carefully and explore their situation with them. Consider any additional vulnerabilities, such as drug or alcohol use, the context for the abuse and the extent to which they may be minimising their experience to gain a fuller picture of the risks faced by the young person.

As the Young People's Checklist is currently in a pilot stage, professional judgement should take precedence over the 'visible' or actuarial score. The Checklist is accompanied by guidance which should be read thoroughly if you're using the tool for the first time.³ **Specialist agencies who work with cases of forced marriage, 'honour'-based violence and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) can also carry out the risk assessment.** See 'Useful links' for information on such agencies.

Best practice and safety planning

The practitioner's role is also to enhance young people's safety by helping them to reduce or minimise the danger. The young person's safety comes first and any intervention that is planned must not put them at further risk.

Confidentiality and support

- **Carefully listen to all allegations** of forced marriage and show sensitivity and respect.
- Reassure young people at risk of forced marriage that the **personal information they are sharing is confidential** and that any information shared will follow strict guidelines on how to do this safely and, where appropriate, in consultation with the young person.
- There may be times that the young person will want to take a course of action that may put them in danger. It is your obligation to **outline all the risks** and provide advice and support that addresses these risks.
- **Under no circumstances should practitioners share information or attempt mediation with the young person's family or the community.** It can increase risk of harm and, in some cases, bring forward the marriage. The family may also punish the young person for trying to get help.
- To act in the best interest of the young person and to keep them safe you may need to **work with other agencies.** Professionals should always make the young person aware if they disclose information to external agencies. You need to ensure the information will not be shared with the young person's family as it can increase risk, and, in some cases, put the person's life in danger.

Keeping safe

- **Put together a tailored safety plan** which can lower the risk of harm.
- **Agree a discreet means of contact** with the young person.
- Always see the young person in a **secure and private place**, and never with family members or a friend present.
- **Gather all the details of the young person** including place and date of birth, National Insurance Number, a photocopy of their passport and a recent photograph.
- **Safeguarding procedures and referral to other agencies**
- **Young people are protected by child protection legislation until their 18th birthday.** Professionals should follow their agency's safeguarding children procedures. A best practice response for a young client should be an integrated response which combines child safeguarding and high risk domestic abuse expertise, tailored to each young person's needs.
- **If the young person is at risk of being, or has been, taken overseas, immediately contact the Forced Marriage Unit.** The young person should obtain contact details of the nearest British Embassy in the area they are travelling to.
- **Specialist services** like the Forced Marriage Unit, IKWRO, Karma Nirvana and its Honour Network Helpline can provide further support.

³ This Young People's Checklist is currently piloted for use with young people aged 13-17 by YPVAs and other professionals. We recommend that non-YPVAs using the Checklist **should already be trained to work with young people and/or victims of domestic abuse before they use the tool.**

- **If you require an interpreter**, use professional interpreting services such as the Language Line. Do not use family members, friends, neighbours or those with influence in the community as there is a danger they may deliberately mislead practitioners or pass on the information to the family.

Useful links

In case of an emergency call 999.

- **Forced Marriage Unit** is a joint Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Home Office unit set up to lead on the Government's forced marriage policy, outreach and casework. It operates both inside the UK and overseas. To report a case/ a suspected case of forced marriage, contact: 020 7008 0151 • www.gov.uk/forced-marriage
- **SafeLives** is a national charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse. Previously called Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (Caada), we chose our new name because we're here for one simple reason: to make sure all families are safe. Additional resources are available via our website. 0117 317 8750 • www.safelives.org.uk • info@safelives.org.uk
- **Forced Marriage** is a one stop website that provides practical information and sources of advice on forced marriage. www.forcedmarriage.net/whatis.html
- The **Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO)** is a national charity which provides advice and support to women and girls from the UK 's Middle Eastern communities who are affected by honour-based violence, child & forced marriage, FGM and other forms of abuse. 0207 920 6460 • www.ikwro.org.uk
- **Karma Nirvana** is a UK registered charity that supports victims and survivors of forced marriage and 'honour' -based abuse. Its Honour Network Helpline offers support and guidance for both victims and those working with them. 0800 5999 247 • www.karmanirvana.org.uk

Relevant family and civil orders

Forced Marriage is not criminal offence currently in the UK. The parliament is currently considering criminalising forced marriage and it is likely that this will become a law in or around May 2014.

- **Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007:** Applying to court for this order will prohibit the family of the person at risk to take certain courses of action which may lead to a forced marriage. This order is also known as FMPO (Forced Marriage Protection Order) which can be effective by preventing the victim's family from contacting them, putting pressure on them or taking them out of country.
- **Children Act 1989:** The Children Act 1989 allocated duties to local authorities, courts, parents and other agencies in the United Kingdom, to ensure children are safeguarded and their welfare is promoted. It centres on the idea that children are best cared for within their own families; however, it also makes provisions for instances when parents and families do not co-operate with statutory bodies. www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents
- **Emergency Protection Orders (EPOs) S.44 Children Act, 1989:** If for some reason the police is not willing to take the young person or child under police protection or the situation is not resolved during 72 hours of police protection, EPO should be considered. The application can be made by anyone, including social workers, police and friends.

References and further reading

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