

Quick guide

Identifying and engaging with young people at risk of forced marriage

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.

Warning signs and risk-aggravating factors

Identifying warning signs

- 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- Being withdrawn from school or prevented from continuing with higher education.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. They 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.
- Talking to a stranger.
- Intimacy in public place.
- Disclosure of rape or sexual abuse.
- Dating someone outside the community or not from the same religion.

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.

- Sexual orientation (lesbian/gay/bisexual or transgender) or behaviour indicating the young person is not heterosexual.

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.

Best practice and safety planning

Confidentiality and support

- Complete the [Young People's Version](#) of the SafeLives Domestic Abuse, Stalking and 'Honour'-Based Violence (DASH) Risk Identification Checklist (RIC).
- Carefully listen to all allegations and concerns the young person has.
- Reassure 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.
- Outline all the risks to the young person and provide advice and support that addresses these risks.
- Do not 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. Also the family may punish the young person for trying to get help.

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

- Professionals should follow their agency's safeguarding children procedures.
- 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.
- 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.

Relevant family and civil orders

- **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). It can be used to prevent the victim's family from contacting them, putting pressure on them or taking them out of country.
- **Emergency Protection Orders (EPOs)** S.44 Children Act 1989: If for some reason the police are not willing to take the young person or child under police protection or the situation is not resolved during 72 hours of police protection, an EPO should be considered. The application can be made by anyone, including social workers, police and friends.

Useful links

- **Forced Marriage Unit** 020 7008 0151 • www.gov.uk/forced-marriage
- **Forced Marriage** www.forcedmarriage.net/whatis.html
- **The Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO)** 0207 920 6460 • www.ikwro.org.uk
- **Karma Nirvana** 0800 5999 247 • www.karmanirvana.org.uk

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