

What is forced marriage?

The term 'forced marriage' is used when one or both partners in an arranged marriage are coerced or pressured into it against their wishes. Coercion can come in many forms, including emotional blackmail, mental abuse, physical abuse, kidnapping and even threats to those involved or their loved ones.

Who can be affected?

Men and women of all ages can be victims of forced marriage – while the practice is more common amongst South Asian cultures, forced marriage isn't limited to one religion or country.

Typically young girls are forced into marriage against their will, but young men can be victims too; often marriage is seen as a 'solution' if it is suspected or known that a son is gay.

It has been known for older, divorced family members (particularly women) to be sent away to get remarried and thus avoid the 'shame' of being single and unmarried.

There have also been reports in recent years of disabled sons or daughters having arranged marriages in spite of the fact that they are not capable of making the decision to marry in the first place. Often this is done to ensure that the child is provided for once their parents are gone, or to prevent the family name being dishonoured by having an unmarried child. This is just as illegal as a forced marriage and should be reported if it is safe to do so.

What's the difference between forced and arranged marriages?

Arranged marriages are a common way for parents to help their children find suitable partners who share their family's religion and traditions. Usually the parents will simply introduce the couple to each other, and from then on they will go on dates and decide whether they are compatible.

Forced marriages differ in that they are arranged by the parents or family, but the child has no say over who they end up marrying. Typically a cousin or distant relative will be chosen for them, and often they have not met their chosen partner before they learn of the impending marriage.

They will feel pressured or threatened into marrying whoever has been chosen for them, and will be expected to move in with their new spouse and leave behind whatever life they had previously.

Coercion

Forced marriage is not condoned by any religion, and these marriages are usually arranged due to societal pressures rather than any desire to follow religious beliefs. Family members may try to coerce you into marrying by telling you that you are bringing dishonour on the family or sinning, but this is simply a way to blackmail you into following through with the arrangement.

It is known for younger victims to be locked in their rooms until they agree to comply with the demands of the family, or have their money and mobile phone taken from them so they can't run away.

Many find themselves subject to emotional or physical abuse by family members if they refuse to marry the chosen partner; this is domestic abuse and is illegal. If you feel that you are in danger of physical abuse or attack then you should remove yourself from the situation as quickly as possible and seek help from the police – they will have contacts with local shelters or charities that can help you find somewhere to stay while you get back on your feet.

Often you will be told that members of the family will come to harm if you don't comply with their demands, but this is likely to be just one more trick to blackmail you into following through with the marriage – if you do

believe anyone is in danger you can inform the police so the matter can be taken care of. If you find yourself threatened by family members or friends of the family, then the police can put you into a protection programme to keep you safe from harm.

It is important to remember that the above situations are all examples of how people can be forced to marry against their will; it is not normal for families to behave in this way and subjecting family members to abuse in any form is illegal.

How to get help - practical measures

It can be difficult to seek help outside of the family, especially if you are being watched or kept in close contact with family members. If you are still able to attend school or work, it is possible to seek help by confiding in a teacher or work colleague you trust – they may be able to help you by calling the relevant authorities or providing you with shelter if you feel endangered.

Forced marriage is illegal in the UK, and the police will assist you in finding safe refuge from your family if it is needed. A [Forced Marriage Protection Order](#) (FMPO) can be issued by the court, preventing the marriage from taking place.

The order introduces certain measures, such as preventing family members from coming into contact with the victim, or order certain people to hand over their passports to prevent victims being taken abroad. Each FMPO is a legally binding document that is unique depending on the circumstances, and can be issued immediately if there is an emergency situation.

Certain professions, such as the NHS or police force, are bound by confidentiality rules and will be eager to help if you are in an emergency situation. If you are able, you can speak to them safe in the knowledge that other members of your family will not find out that you are trying to get help.

If you have a trusted friend that understands your situation, it could help to seek shelter at their house while you figure out your next move or get outside help. Someone outside of your family's community could be safer, as they are unlikely to contact your parents or feel obliged to inform anyone you know – only seek help from a friend if you are certain they or their family will understand the seriousness of your situation.

Recently charities and organisations have been spreading word about a last-minute tactic being used to alert authorities at the airport and get help before leaving the country; [hiding metal about your person](#) can set off the metal detectors before you board a plane and have you taken away for search by airline officials. As any interviews or searches are carried out in private, you have the chance to explain your situation to them without your family overhearing – security staff at airports have been briefed on how to deal with cases of forced marriage, and will be able to get you the help you need.

Staying safe

It may be the case that young men or women who argue with their parents over the marriage can find themselves kept trapped in the family home so they can be kept under watch until the wedding ceremony is performed. Whether you are within your own home or another relative's house, this is still illegal and false imprisonment – if it is safe and you have access to a phone, you can call the police or Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) to make them aware of the situation and get you out of there.

There are many charities and helplines dedicated to helping men and women escape from abusive situations – in the first instance you should call the FMU for advice, or if you need emergency accommodation you can call a local refuge to seek help.

What can be done?

Accommodation, food and money can be provided if you find yourself needing to seek shelter urgently. Police can arrest anyone causing you physical harm and a Forced Marriage Protection Order preventing anyone from forcing you into marriage and be obtained immediately if you are in need.

If you are taken to another country and forced to marry against your will, you can get help at a British Foreign Embassy – contact details and locations for all British Foreign Embassies can be found [here](#). If you are a British national you will be brought back to the UK and help will be given to resolve the situation.

In more extreme cases you can be given an entirely new identity and the chance to start life safe from the threat of a forced marriage. The police and courts will help you through the entire process and help you relocate to safety, along with financial help to get you back on your feet.

Warning signs for professionals

Whilst the following is not a comprehensive list, nor are they guaranteed indicators of forced marriage, they can help identify if a student or colleague is in trouble:

- History of siblings being removed early from education
- Excessive parental control and restriction; sudden restrictions where there were none before could indicate an impending marriage
- Parental control of income or poor work/school attendance; sudden drop in attendance or performance could indicate problems
- Evidence of self-harm, eating disorders, depression or substance abuse
- Evidence of domestic violence, attempts at running away from home or evidence of family conflict

What can you do to help someone?

If you know of someone who is in danger of being forced to marry there are steps you can take to help them safely:

- You can let them know in private that you are there for them if they need to speak to someone about the situation
- You can contact the Forced Marriage Unit if they have been taken (or are about to be taken) abroad for the ceremony. They will need as many details about the situation as possible, for example:
 - Where they have been taken
 - When they were supposed to return
 - When you last heard from them
 - Any names, addresses or specific details about the ceremony
- If they are still in the country and able to safely seek help, you can help them find and contact the relevant authorities to resolve the situation

Useful Information

Karma Nirvana: <http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk/help-me/>

Forced Marriage Unit: <https://www.gov.uk/forced-marriage>

Forced Marriage Unit: 020 7008 0151

Against Forced Marriages: <http://againstforcedmarriages.org/forced-marriage/faqs>

JAN Trust: <http://jantrust.org/>

Women's Aid: <http://www.womensaid.org.uk/>

Men's Aid: http://www.mensadvice.org.uk/mens_advice.php

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