



**WHAT IS A
FORCED
MARRIAGE?**

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A forced marriage is a marriage where one or both people do not (or in the case of some people with learning or physical disabilities, cannot) consent to the marriage and pressure or abuse is used.

An arranged marriage is not the same as a forced marriage. In an arranged marriage, the families take a leading role in choosing the marriage partner, but the choice of whether to enter the marriage is left to both people.

A marriage must be entered into with the full and free consent of both people. Everyone involved should feel that they have a choice.

The pressure put on people to marry against their will can be physical (including threats, actual physical violence and sexual violence) or emotional and psychological (for example, when someone is made to feel like they're bringing shame on their family. Financial abuse (taking your wages or not giving you any money) can also be a factor.

In some cases people may be taken abroad without knowing that they are to be married. When they arrive in the country their passport(s) may be taken by their family to try to stop them from returning home.

Forced marriage is an abuse of human rights, a form of violence against women and men, where it affects children, child abuse and where it affects those with disabilities abuse of vulnerable people.

If you or someone you know is being forced into a marriage, help and advice is available.

WHAT TO DO...

If you or someone you know is being forced into marriage, either in the UK or abroad, you can contact the FORCED MARRIAGE UNIT (FMU).

The FMU provides confidential information and assistance to potential victims and concerned professionals. It works with partner organisations, both in the UK and overseas, to ensure that action is taken to try to prevent a forced marriage taking place – in some instances this involves rescue and repatriation. The FMU also provides support and information to individuals who have already been forced to marry.

All caseworkers in the FMU have experience in dealing with the cultural, social and emotional issues surrounding forced marriage. The FMU can offer advice and support to anyone in the UK regardless of nationality. However, overseas British Embassies, High Commissions and Consulates can only provide consular assistance to British nationals, and in certain circumstances to EU or Commonwealth nationals (but not in the country of their own nationality).

Contact details for the FMU are on the back of this leaflet

YOU ARE NOT ALONE...

When you are caught in this situation it is not unusual to feel completely alone...but you are not. Each year, more than possible cases of forced marriage are reported to us.

Around 85% of those cases involve women who have been forced into marriage and some 15% of cases involve men. And there are many more cases – involving both men and women – that don't get reported.



NARINA'S STORY

now 21

"I felt that I had no option. Once they had taken me out of the country there was nothing I could do. I had no contact with anyone but the family. My mother was caught between my feelings and

the community's expectations. They made me feel that I would dishonour my family if I didn't marry him."

Narina was 18 when her parents took her back home for a family holiday. She was kept in the family home and wasn't allowed out on her own. Finally, she and her sister managed to run away and contacted the British Consulate, who found her a place to stay and helped her contact her friends in the UK. She eventually came home and with the help of a women's refuge and her friends, has built a new life for herself and her sister.



RAJ'S STORY

now 29

"People don't realise that men can also find themselves in this situation. I don't know if I could have told anyone even if I'd had the chance to. It's not exactly macho, is it, admitting that you were held

hostage by your family and forced to marry someone you'd never even met..."

Raj was forced into a marriage. When he finally returned to the UK, it took him 3 years to get out of it. He may have been able to avoid the financial and emotional turmoil of divorce if he had known about the support and help at hand.



SOLA'S STORY

now 24

"I've always wanted to be independent, so I only agreed to go because they said my grandma was sick. It wasn't true; when I got there they showed me new clothes and jewellery and said the wedding would be at the end of the week. They knew I'd be isolated when I got there because I'm deaf."

Sola's family had not learnt sign language and found it difficult to communicate with her. When she told them her plans for moving away to study at university, they decided it would be better for her if she got married instead – but didn't ask her. Luckily Sola had a mobile phone her family didn't know about, and she used it to text friends in the UK, who alerted the FMU. The British Embassy helped her to return. She is now at university and has no contact with her family.



LENA'S STORY

now 19

"My father found out that I had a boyfriend and that changed everything in our family. He literally kept me prisoner in the house, wouldn't let me see my friends and then started planning my wedding – to a man I had never met! He said that I had to follow our customs, and there would be no discussion. I didn't have any way out..."

When Lena's father found out about her boyfriend, he was so angry that he cut off her hair. He told her that having a boyfriend was against their culture. She would have to marry the man he chose and have a virginity test. Lena was so scared that she took an overdose. Fortunately she recovered in hospital.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What happens when you call the FMU helpline?

You will talk to an experienced caseworker who will listen and offer you confidential support and information. You can discuss your options with them. We can give you information on your rights and the services available to support you. **We will not contact your family.**

I can't afford to leave home. How is being homeless with no money a better life than a forced marriage?

There are housing services available for men and for women. These are safe environments where you can get emotional and practical help such as access to counselling, as well as help with sorting out benefits and more permanent housing. You will be encouraged to become independent and to make your own decisions about your future.

How can you guarantee my safety?

While we cannot guarantee safety, we can put you in contact with agencies whose job it is to help protect you. You should always call the police if you are in immediate danger. Refuges can provide you with somewhere safe to stay if you choose to leave home.

If I think I might be forced into a marriage when I go abroad, what should I do?

Think carefully before you decide to go abroad. Once you are abroad, it will be much harder to get help. If you decide to go, please contact the FMU for advice. You should fill out the information on the back of this booklet and leave it with a trusted friend. You should also make sure you take the address and contact number of the High Commission/Embassy in the country you are visiting (call the FMU or go to **www.fco.gov.uk** for these details). Use the tear off-slip at the back of this booklet to keep a record and keep this safe. Take some money with you in pounds and in the local currency, a spare mobile phone (with roaming facility) and a copy of your passport and tickets.

What happens if I am abroad and realise that I am being forced into a marriage?

You or a trusted friend should contact the nearest British Consulate, Embassy or High Commission. They will contact the FMU in the UK and arrange for assistance.

What happens if I'm abroad and manage to run away, but I don't have enough money to fly home?

If you haven't got the money, and you can't borrow it from a friend or relative, the Foreign & Commonwealth

Office may in some circumstances be able to loan you the money for a ticket. But you'll have to pay this back when you get home.

How long will it take before I can come back to the UK and where will I stay while arrangements are being made?

We will try to make arrangements for you to come back as soon as possible. However, if you do have to stay abroad for any length of time, we will try to find you a suitable place to stay.

If I'm abroad, what will happen if I don't have my passport?

Provided you are a British national, we can issue you with an emergency passport.

I got married overseas. Is my marriage valid in the UK?

If your marriage is seen as valid in the country where it took place, in many cases it will be valid in the UK. You must talk to a solicitor, regardless of whether you had a religious or civil marriage. Religious divorce is not valid in the UK.

Can you still help me if I'm under 16?

Yes we can. Please call the FMU to discuss these options.

My family are being abusive and threatening me with violence if I don't go through with the marriage, what should I do?

Your personal safety is important. If you ever feel that you are in any danger you should contact the police. The police will be able to assess your situation and advise about your personal safety and also refer you to support organisations. They will not tell your family that you have made contact with them.

Can I get legal protection to prevent the marriage?

Yes. Under the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007, you can apply to designated courts in England and Wales for a Forced Marriage Civil Protection Order, or ask someone to do so on your behalf. These orders can be used to prevent someone being forced into marriage or to protect someone if a forced marriage has already taken place. A person may be arrested if they breach an order. For further information about protection orders you can visit www.hm-courts-service.gov.uk/cms/14490.htm.

I was forced into a marriage overseas; can you refuse my spouse a visa to come here?

The UK Border Agency may be able to, but you may need to state publicly that you do not want your spouse to join you in the UK. Call us on 020 7008 0151 and we will advise you on what we can do to help.

The Forced Marriage Unit offers confidential support and information.

You have a right to choose... and the Forced Marriage Unit is there to help you.

You can call:

(+44) (0)20 7008 0151

between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday

Global Response centre (in and out of hours emergency)

(+44) (0)20 7008 1500

Or e-mail: fm@fco.gov.uk

Find out more about the work of the Forced Marriage Unit at: www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage

Notes

ORGANISATIONS THAT CAN HELP...

As well as the Forced Marriage Unit, there are a number of organisations that can give you confidential advice and information.

NATIONAL SERVICES

Police in an emergency 999

National Domestic Violence Helpline
(24 hour Freephone) 0808 200 0247

NSPCC Child Protection Helpline 0808 800 5000

Samaritans 0845 790 9090

Shelter (for housing advice) 0808 800 4444

GENERAL ADVICE

Southall Black Sisters 020 8571 9595

Newham Asian Women's Project 020 8472 0528

Ashiana Project (London) 020 8539 0427

Ashiana (Sheffield) 0114 255 5740

Honour Network 0800 5999 247

(Advice for both men and women)

Henna Foundation (Cardiff) 029 2049 6920

Iranian and Kurdish Women's
Rights Organisation (IKWRO) 0207 920 6460

Respond (learning disabilities) 0207 383 0700

Forward 0208 960 4000

(Specifically for African women)

Shakti Women's Aid (Edinburgh) 0131 475 2399

Contact the FMU for details of regional services or go to
www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage

Information to leave with a trusted friend

If you are worried that you or someone you know may be taken abroad, the information below should be recorded. If you /they need assistance this information will be essential.

- > Name and date of birth as shown on passport
- > Passport number (with the date and place of issue)
- > Overseas contact details and address of where you'll/they'll be staying and other relatives you/they may be visiting when abroad
- > Address and telephone number (including mobile phone number) in the UK
- > A recent photograph
- > Contact details of someone you/they trust in the UK
- > Parents' names
- > Departure and expected return dates
- > Who you/they are travelling with, and your/their family members staying in the UK

Information to take with you

High Commission/Embassy - Address/Telephone:

Your Passport Number:

Date of Issue:

Name and address of relative in country you are visiting:

Forced Marriage Unit: (+44) (0)20 7008 0151

E: fmu@fco.gov.uk

If you are going abroad make sure you keep this information with you

The **Forced Marriage Unit** is open:
Monday – Friday from 9.00am – 5.00pm

Call us on: **(+44) (0)20 7008 0151**
or *Global Response centre*
(in and out of hours emergency) **(+44) (0)20 7008 1500**
Or email: **fmu@fco.gov.uk**

**Forced Marriage Unit, Foreign and Commonwealth Office,
King Charles Street, London SW1A 2AH**

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage>