



Distributed by the West Midlands Specialist Domestic Abuse Consortium as part of the Our Girl Campaign

# FORCED MARRIAGE

**5000-8000** people are at risk of being forced into marriage every year in the UK.

A **forced marriage** is one in which one or both spouses do not, (or cannot, in the case of some adults with physical disabilities or mental incapacity) consent to the marriage and coercion is involved.

**Coercion** may include emotional force, physical force, threats of violence, or financial pressure.

Forced marriage is a **criminal offence** in the UK.

There is a clear distinction between **forced marriage and arranged marriage**. In arranged marriages, while families may take a lead, the choice of whether to accept the arrangement remains with the prospective spouses.

If families have to resort to violence or coercion to make someone marry, that person's consent has not been given freely and it is therefore considered a **forced marriage**.

## WHO IS AT RISK? FACTS & FIGURES FROM THE FORCED MARRIAGE UNIT

The Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) dealt with **1428** cases in 2016:

**14%** of cases came from the **West Midlands**

**26%** of victims were **under 18**

**34%** of victims were aged **18-25**

**80%** of cases involved **female victims**

**10%** of victims had a **learning disability**

**60%** of victims were from a **South Asian** background

**90** host countries across Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America were involved

**11%** of cases had no overseas element: the activity taking place **within the UK**

## FORCED MARRIAGE WARNING SIGNS

### EDUCATION



- Persistent absence/ requests for extended leave

- Failure to return from visits to country of origin

- Fear about holidays
- Surveillance by siblings/ cousins at school
- Decline in behaviour, engagement, performance or punctuality
- Not allowed to attend extra-curricular activities

- Sudden announcement of engagement to a stranger
- Poor exam results
- Prevented from going on to further/higher education
- Withdrawal from school, or removal from a day centre of a person with a disability

### EMPLOYMENT



- Performance or attendance poor
- Not allowed to work/ limited career choice
- Unable to attend business trips or functions
- Subject to financial control e.g. confiscation of wages/income
- Leaving work accompanied
- Unable to be flexible in working arrangements

### FAMILY HISTORY

- Early or forced marriage of siblings, or self harm/ suicide of siblings
- Unreasonable restrictions eg kept at home by parents

- Death of a parent
- Family disputes
- Running away from home



### HEALTH



- Accompanied to doctors or clinics
- Eating disorders
- Depression/ Isolation

- Self harm or attempted suicide
- Substance misuse
- Unwanted pregnancy
- Female Genital Mutilation

### POLICE



- Victim or other siblings within the family reported missing
- Female genital mutilation

- Reports of domestic abuse, harassment or breaches of the peace at family home
- Victim reported for offences e.g. shoplifting or substance misuse

- Threats to kill and attempts to kill or harm
- Reports of other offences such as rape or kidnap
- Acid attacks



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## TALKING ABOUT FORCED MARRIAGE

Forced marriage is an extremely sensitive issue and there are many barriers that may stop someone who is at risk from seeking help. They may be frightened that their family or community will find out, and find it difficult to trust anyone.

If you notice warning signs and are concerned about someone, there are sensitive ways to enquire which may help them to disclose.

Some professionals have more opportunities than others to speak to possible victims in confidence. Health and education professionals in particular may be able to create opportunities to see young people alone. Possible introductory questions include:

*"How are things at home – do you get on with your parents?"*

*"What do you do at weekends?"*

*"Apart from school, do you get out much?"*

Depending on the answers, you may ask more in-depth questions:

*"Can you choose what you want to do and when you want to do it – such as seeing friends, working or maybe studying?"*

*"Are your parents supportive of your aspirations – what do they hope for you?"*

*"Do your parents have similar aspirations for all your brothers and sisters?"*

If you think someone is trapped in a forced marriage, possible questions could be:

*"How is your relationship?"*

*"Does your partner or family let you do what you want, when you want?"*

*"Have you ever been afraid of your partner's or a family member's behaviour?"*

*"Have you ever been hurt or threatened by your partner or anyone else at home?"*

## WHAT TO DO

If you suspect someone is being, or has been forced into marriage:

- ✓ Speak to them immediately alone in a secure, private place
- ✓ Listen to them, believe them, recognise and respect their wishes
- ✓ Reassure them about confidentiality, that you will not inform their family, however if action must be taken in their best interests or to prevent crime, inform them of the action taken
- ✓ Perform a risk assessment such as a DASH or tool as guided by your agency
- ✓ **Contact a trained forced marriage specialist in your area (see contacts below) as soon as possible**
- ✓ If the young person is under 18 years of age, refer them to your organisation's designated person responsible for safeguarding children and activate local safeguarding procedures
- ✓ If the person is an adult with support needs, refer them to the designated person responsible for safeguarding vulnerable adults and activate local safeguarding procedures
- ✓ Establish and agree an effective method of contacting the victim discreetly in future, possibly using a code-word to confirm identity
- ✓ **If someone is at risk of being, or has been, taken overseas, immediately contact the Forced Marriage Unit on 020 7008 0151.** The young person should obtain contact details of the nearest British Embassy in the area they are travelling to
- ✓ In an emergency, contact the police on 999

## DON'T

- ✗ Ignore your concerns or decide it is not your responsibility
- ✗ Share information or **attempt mediation with the young person's family or the community.** It can increase risk of harm or bring forward the marriage. The family may also punish the young person for trying to get help
- ✗ Use family members, friends or prominent community members as translators. Always use an accredited interpreter. Using telephone interpreting services can make it easier for some people to disclose anonymously

For help and support contact a specialist agency in your area:



0808 800 0028



0121 552 6448



02476 444 077



0800 0194 400