



HM Government

# The Right to Choose

What services and organisations should do to help people at risk of forced marriage.

May 2022

Easy read version of the multi-agency practice guidelines for dealing with forced marriage



## What the words mean

### Arranged marriage

When the families of both partners arrange the marriage and both people getting married agree to it.

### Forced marriage

When the families plan the marriage but the people getting married do not agree to the marriage and are forced to go through with it. Even if just one of the two people getting married does not agree to the marriage, it is a forced marriage.

## Forced marriage



A marriage should be arranged only if both partners want to get married.



Forced marriage can involve threats and abuse from the family. Some people who do not fully understand what marriage is can be tricked or persuaded into getting married. This is a forced marriage too.



Most victims of forced marriage are women and girls. They are often 16 to 25 years old. Some are women with disabilities.



Most women have ties to South Asian countries. But they can also be from the Middle East or anywhere in the world.



Many forced marriages involve bringing one partner here from another country or taking a person abroad to get married.



The government's Forced Marriage Unit helps hundreds of people each year. But many cases are not reported.



Forced marriage is a type of violence against women and girls. It is a serious abuse of human rights.

## Why does forced marriage happen?

Forced marriage happens for many reasons.

Some people say this happens because of religion or culture. But all religions say forced marriage is wrong and both partners must agree to get married.



Sometimes the agreement for the marriage was made between families a long time ago when the partners were children.



It can be to keep land, houses or the family's money in the family.



It can be to make family relationships stronger, for example if two cousins are to get married.



It can be to stop one of the partners, usually the woman, from doing things like wearing make up, or drinking alcohol.



Or to stop them having a boyfriend from a different religion or culture.



Or to help someone in another country get UK residence or citizenship.



Or to make sure there is support to care for a child or adult with special needs in the future.



Or to make sure there is support for elderly parents.



None of these reasons mean that forced marriage is OK.

## What is 'honour' based abuse?



Women and girls are usually the victims of 'honour' based abuse.

It includes lots of abuse like

- Forced marriage
- Female genital mutilation (FGM), when a girl's private parts are cut
- Physical abuse including breast flattening
- Locking the victim in the house
- Assaulting someone
- Controlling where someone goes and how they spend their money
- Murder



It is done to women to follow the way some people in their community think things should be done. They think women should behave and be treated in a certain way.



If women do not behave in a certain way then the family thinks it brings shame or dishonour to them or the community.



Often people in the community agree with the 'honour' based abuse, so there can be many people involved in it. Some may even live in other countries.



Survivors of 'honour' based abuse usually can't return to their families or communities. So they can be alone and without support.

## Victims of forced marriage



The victims of forced marriage often have no one to turn to for help.



A young woman who could have a forced marriage often stops going to school or college.



They may feel depressed or even self-harm.



It can stop them developing and mean they don't have good opportunities in life for work and money.



Young women with learning or physical disabilities or illness may find it even harder to report abuse.



1 in 5 victims are men. Most of them are boys or young men. They can find it hard to ask for help as they can be embarrassed or think they won't be believed.



Many organisations who support victims of forced marriage only support girls and women. But some support men too.



Men with disabilities can be victims of forced marriage as parents may decide their son needs a wife to care for him.



Victims of forced marriage can be people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. This is because families may think it will 'cure' the person. Or it will stop people in the community from finding out.



It can be very hard for a woman to leave a forced marriage. She may be abused, and may have no support from other family members. She might be made to do the housework for all the family.



Some women in forced marriages are not allowed to leave the house on their own so they cannot ask for help.



Sometimes victims run away, but families and the community can find them and make them return. Sometimes they are punished for running away.



Some women are taken abroad for a forced marriage. They may not have their phone, money or passport so they cannot ask for help.

## The Forced Marriage Unit



This is part of the Foreign Office and the Home Office. It runs a helpline which gives advice and support to victims.



There is a worker who supports people with a learning disability who may be forced into marriage.

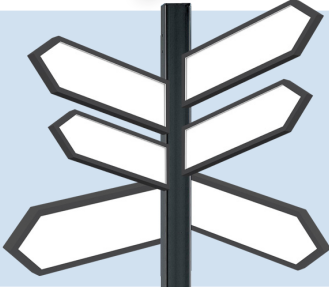


They can help anyone in the UK, even if they're not British.





They can help British people if they are abroad, and can give them advice and help them return to the UK.



They can't give as much help to people who aren't British in other countries, but they can tell them about organisations who can help them.



The unit also helps staff working for other organisations including the police and social workers to understand about forced marriage and work to stop it.



If you believe someone has been forced to support someone to get a visa, you can also report this as an immigration crime:  
Report an immigration or border crime -  
GOV.UK [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

## The Forced Marriage Unit



People at risk of forced marriage need specialist help. The same staff should lead the support.



Staff need to remember they may only have one chance to help the person so they must act quickly.



Staff should see the person in a private room and on their own.



They should explain the different choices the person can make.



If the person is under 18 or has care and support needs, they should tell social services. It is a safeguarding matter.



They should tell them everything is confidential and their family won't be told.



They should find a way to speak to the person in a safe way. Maybe using a code word.



They should find a safe place for the person to go if this is needed.

## Supporting victims with learning disability



Sometimes people with a learning disability are forced to marry. Some can understand and agree but others can be tricked or persuaded into doing this.



Some people with a learning disability do not understand and so they cannot agree to getting married.



A project called 'My Marriage, My Choice' made some tools to help people with a learning disability, their families and the staff who support them <http://mymarriagemychoice.co.uk/>



People with a learning disability can be more likely to be abused than other people, but they still feel the same hurt and pain that other people do.



People with a learning disability have the same human rights as other people. But they may not be treated well and might not be listened to or allowed to make their own choices.



There are lots of reasons for that. People with a learning disability often have speech and communication difficulties. Or they may not be able to tell people their thoughts and feelings. Or they may not have someone they can trust. Or they may like to please their family members.



They might not understand what forced marriage is and trust their families too much.



It can be hard to agree to being married. This includes having sex, having children, living somewhere else.



Family members can arrange a marriage to get a carer for their child. Or they want them to marry like all their other children. Or even because they think it will make the learning disability go away!

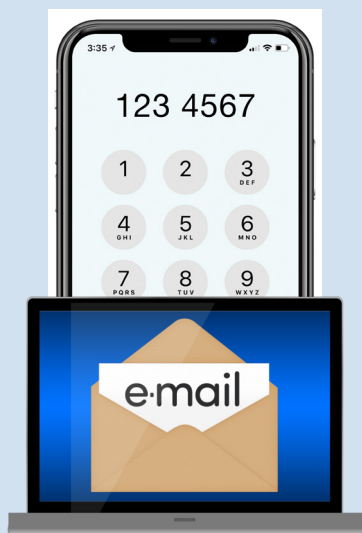


In some cultures the older children have to marry first. If the oldest child has a learning disability and is not married it could stop younger brothers and sisters from getting married.



The Mental Capacity Act 2005 can protect people with a learning disability. No one can decide that a person can have sex or get married if they cannot understand and decide for themselves. The family does not have the right to make the decision for their child.

## How to get help from the Forced Marriage Unit



Call: **020 7008 0151**

Monday–Friday: **09.00–17.00**

Call from abroad: **0044 20 7008 0151**

Email: [fmufcdo@gov.uk](mailto:fmufcdo@gov.uk)

Web: [www.gov.uk/forced-marriage](http://www.gov.uk/forced-marriage)

Address: **Forced Marriage Unit,  
Foreign, Commonwealth, & Development Office,  
King Charles Street,  
London, SW1A 2AH**

If you need to contact the FMU urgently  
phone the Foreign, Commonwealth &  
Development Office on **020 7008 5000**

In an emergency, always call the police on **999**