

Safeguarding Factsheet 5: Forced Marriage

The basics

A forced marriage is where one or both people do not (or in cases of people with learning disabilities, cannot) consent to the marriage and pressure or abuse is used. It is an appalling and indefensible practice and is recognised in the UK as a form of violence against women and men, domestic/child abuse, and a serious abuse of human rights.

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 wages or not giving any money) can also be a factor.

Note: In an arranged marriage, both parties have consented to the union but can still refuse to marry if they choose to.

Legislation

The Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 makes it a criminal offence to force someone to marry

This includes:

- Taking someone overseas to force them to marry (whether or not the forced marriage takes place)
- Marrying someone who lacks the mental capacity to consent to the marriage (whether they are pressured to or not)
- Breaching a Forced Marriage Protection Order is also a criminal offence
- The civil remedy of obtaining a Forced Marriage Protection Order through the family courts continues to exist alongside the new criminal offence, so victims can choose how they wish to be assisted

Forcing someone to marry can result in a sentence of up to 7 years in prison.

What to do

If someone is being forced into marriage either in the UK or abroad, the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) can help.

The FMU provides information and assistance to potential/ actual victims and frontline 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 the most extreme 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 an EU or Commonwealth national (but not in the country of their own nationality).

Disobeying a forced marriage protection order can result in a sentence of up to 5 years in prison.

Email: fmu@fco.gov.uk
Telephone: 020 7008 0151 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)
Out of hours: 020 7008 1500 (ask for the Global Response Centre)

Call 999 in an emergency. A trained professional will give free advice on what to do next.

More Information

[The Right to Choose: Multi-agency statutory guidance for dealing with forced marriage](#)

[Forced marriage - A survivor's handbook](#)

Twitter: @FMUnit

Facebook: [Facebook Forced marriage](#)