

Two Page Guide

Forced Marriage

What is forced marriage?

A forced marriage occurs without the full consent of one or both parties, or where consent is unable to be given (due to learning/ physical disabilities) and duress is a factor. Duress can include physical, psychological, financial, sexual and emotional pressure, use of deception and other means. Duress may come from parents, the wider family and /or the community. Duress and forced marriage cannot be justified on religious or cultural grounds.

A 'forced' marriage is not the same as an arranged marriage; in an arranged marriage, the choice of whether to accept the arrangement ultimately is with those due to be married. Most cases of forced marriage involve girls and young women aged between 13 and 30, although victims can be male. Some forced marriages take place in the UK and may involve a partner coming from overseas; others may involve a British citizen being sent abroad.

Forced marriage is an abuse of human rights and is contrary to UK law. Where forced marriage involves a child, it is breach of children's rights. A child who is forced to marry is at risk of significant harm through physical, sexual and emotional abuse.

Parents who force their children to marry may seek to justify their behaviour, believing that it protects their children, preserves cultural and /or religious traditions and caters for stronger family relationships. Some other key reasons may include controlling unwanted sexuality, preventing perceived unsuitable relationships, protecting 'family honour', achieving financial gain, ensuring care for a child or adult with additional needs, and assisting claims for residence and citizenship.

Warning signs of a forced marriage?

Education – Absence; request for extended leave / home education; failure to return from visit to country of origin, surveillance by family; deterioration in behaviour, achievement or punctuality

Health – self-harm; attempted suicide; eating disorders; depression; female genital mutilation; pregnancy, accompanied to doctors

Police involvement – other siblings reported missing; domestic violence; threats or attempts to kill or harm

Family history – siblings forced to marry, married young; self-harm or suicide of sibling(s); death of a parent; missing & running away from home; unreasonable restrictions (physical and financial)

Employment – poor performance/ attendance; inflexible working arrangements; not allowed to work, accompanied to and from work.

[See Forced marriage victim indicators](#)

What does the law say about it?

The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 makes provision for protecting children, young people and adults from being forced to marry, through Forced Marriage Protection Orders. The minimum age at which a person can give consent to marriage is 16.

From 16 June 2014, sections 120 and 121 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 came into force. This means that an individual will commit an offence if s/he uses violence, threats or any other form of coercion to cause another person to enter into a marriage, without their free and full consent. Section 120 makes it an offence to breach a [Forced Marriage Protection Order](#).

Those who force a person to marry can be prosecuted for a variety of offences including; conspiracy, assault, kidnap, abduction, false imprisonment, harassment, child cruelty and trafficking.

What do practitioners need to do and how can they find out more?

All practitioners should make themselves aware of the warning signs.

Relatives, friends, community leaders and neighbours should not be used as interpreters when speaking to children, and it is important that practitioners understand the complex and sensitive issues that children face in challenging a forced marriage and the risks they, their siblings and other family members may encounter.

Practitioners should also be aware that children who are at risk of serious harm through child sexual exploitation, trafficking, forced marriage, honour-based violence and female genital mutilation are often 'hidden' and may be also missing from education, and /or care or home. Where information suggests that a child or young person, under the age of 18 is at risk of being forced to marry, practitioners must contact MASH consultation service, who may, in partnership with the Police, undertake Section 47 (safeguarding) enquiries.

Where the concerns about the welfare and safety of the child or young person are such that a referral to Children's social care is required contact the MASH and complete a [Multi-Agency Contact Form \(MACF\)](#)

'One Chance' Rule

All practitioners working with victims of forced marriage need to be aware of the 'one chance' rule. That is, they may only have one chance to speak to a potential victim and may only have one chance to save a life. This means that all practitioners working within statutory agencies need to be aware of their responsibilities and obligations when they become aware of potential forced marriage cases. If the victim is allowed to walk out the door without support being offered, that one chance might be wasted.

Coercion is likely to have been used with one or both spouses; by family members, friends and the wider community. This may include threats of violence, being held against their will, emotional threats and other forms of coercion and harassment, such as not being allowed to go anywhere without being accompanied by someone.

Key contacts and more information

Multi-agency safeguarding hub 01926 414144 (out of hours tel: 01926 886 922)

[Forced Marriage – Regional Safeguarding Procedures](#)