

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 or not to accept the arrangement ultimately lies 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, and 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 in 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 victim of 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 and 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.

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 is able to 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 should practitioners do?

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.

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 the Children's Services Duty and Advice Team, who may, in partnership with the Police, undertake Section 47 (safeguarding) enquiries.

Key contacts

If you would like additional help and support on Forced Marriage then you can contact the Children's Services Duty and Advice Team, by calling 01642 726004 (or 0870 240 2994 for out of hours).

You can also contact the Halo Project, a specialist service for victims of 'honour-based' violence and forced marriage, by calling 01642 683045 or visiting [their website](#).

You can access more information from the [GOV.UK website on forced marriage](#), or contact the Forced Marriage Unit by calling 020 7008 0151. You can also read the government's [multi-agency practice guidelines: handling cases of forced marriage](#).