

Forced Marriage: Help and Advice

What is forced marriage?

The term 'forced marriage' is used when one or both partners in an arranged marriage are coerced or pressured into it against their wishes.

- **Forced Marriage:** A marriage without the consent of one or both parties and where duress is a factor.
- **Arranged Marriage:** The families of both spouses take a leading role in choosing the marriage partner, but the choice whether to accept the arrangement remains.

Forced marriage is not condoned by any religion, and these marriages are usually arranged due to cultural/societal pressures rather than any desire to follow religious beliefs.

Coercion to marry can come in many forms, including emotional blackmail, mental abuse, physical abuse, kidnapping and even threats to those involved or their loved ones.

Men and women of all ages can be victims of forced marriage – while the practice is more common amongst South Asian cultures, forced marriage isn't limited to one religion or country. It has been known for parents to misguidedly force their children to marry when they disagree with the child's lifestyle or sexuality, believing that they will avoid shaming the family and themselves.

In 2013, the Forced Marriage Unit gave advice and help in 1302 cases, with 12 cases involving people who identify as lesbian, gay, transgender or bisexual. Whilst this might not seem like a large proportion to some, a case may involve more than one person and these are only cases where the victims knew how to get help and felt able to. The actual number of cases may be much greater. Often it is believed that women are the only victims in forced marriage, however men are victims too. It is important not only for the general public to know this, but the victims themselves; often they do not realise that they are being illegally forced to marry, and may consider it a normal part of life that they have to deal

with.

How to get help - practical measures

It can be difficult to seek help outside of the family, especially if you are being watched or kept in close contact with family members. If you are still able to attend school or work, it is possible to seek help by confiding in a teacher or work colleague you trust – they may be able to help you by calling the relevant authorities or providing you with shelter if you feel endangered.

Forced marriage is illegal in the UK, and the police will assist you in finding safe refuge from your family if it is needed. A Forced Marriage Protection Order (FMPO) can be issued by the court, preventing the marriage from taking place. In extreme cases, victims have been removed from the family completely and given the right help to live independently away from risk of harm.

Recently charities and organisations have been spreading word about a last-minute tactic being used to alert authorities at the airport and get help before leaving the country; hiding metal about your person can set off the metal detectors before you board a plane and have you taken away for search by airline officials. As any interviews or searches are carried out in private, you have the chance to explain your situation to them without your family overhearing.

Karma Nirvana: <http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk/help-me/>

Forced Marriage Unit: <https://www.gov.uk/forced-marriage>

Forced Marriage Unit: 020 7008 0151

National Domestic Violence Helpline (Womens Aid) 0808 2000 247

In Lancashire: Contact your local Community Safety Department/Minorities Team for advice.

Lancashire Constabulary Community Safety/Minorities Teams

Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale 01282 472190

Blackburn and Darwen 01254 353638

Ribble Valley and Hyndburn 01254 353718

Chorley, South Ribble and West Lancs 01257 515332

Preston, Lea and Fulwood 01772 209110

Blackpool and Fylde 01253 607242

Lancaster and Wyre 01995 607870