



Pan Bedfordshire One Minute Guide Forced Marriage

What is Forced Marriage?

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 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 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 – 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.

What does the law say?

[The Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014](#) made it a criminal offence in England, Wales and Scotland to force someone to marry. (It is a criminal offence in Northern Ireland under separate legislation). 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)

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

It is also possible for victims or those at risk to apply for a Forced Marriage Protection Order (FMPO). As a civil law measure, an application for a FMPO would be made in the family court. Read [guidance from the Ministry of Justice on taking out an FMPO](#). Failure to comply with the requirements or terms set out in a FMPO granted by the Family Court, is a criminal offence and can result in a sentence of up to 5 years in prison. In 2017 the government introduced lifelong anonymity for victims of forced marriage to encourage more victims of this hidden crime to come forward.

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, 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 abuse 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 their local Children's Services, who may, in partnership with the Police, undertake Section 47 enquiries.

Key contacts and more information

To make a referral contact your local Children's Services;
[Bedford Borough](#) – 01234 718700
[Central Bedfordshire](#) – 0300 300 8585
[Luton](#) - 01582 537653
 Out of office hours Emergency Duty Team - 0300 300 8123

[Luton All Women's Centre \(LAWC\)](#) supports women and girls living in Luton and Bedfordshire and offering a wide-range of advisory, information, practical and holistic support services in respect of issues such as harmful practices, domestic abuse/violence and sexual exploitation.

You can access more information from the [gov.uk website](#) on Forced Marriage and contact the Forced Marriage Unit on 020 7008 0151

[HALO](#) The Halo Project Charity is a national project that will support victims of honour-based violence, forced marriages and FGM by providing appropriate advice and support to victims. We will also work with key partners to provide required interventions and advice necessary for the protection and safety of victims.

[Crown Prosecution Service webpage](#) on Honour Based Violence and Forced Marriage.

[Pan Bedfordshire Inter-agency Child Protection procedures Forced Marriage](#) .

