Forced Marriage and Honour Based Violence and Abuse

When working with cases of force marriage and honour based violence the usual principles and guidance for safeguarding and working with children and families are not appropriate; in fact they may inadvertently place the victim at greater risk of harm.

Please keep this in mind when reading this guidance

What is a Forced Marriage?
In a forced marriage, one or both spouses do not (or in the case of some vulnerable adults, cannot) consent to the marriage and duress is involved. Duress can involve physical, psychological, financial, sexual and emotional pressure.

A clear distinction must be made between a forced marriage and an arranged marriage. In arranged marriages the families of both spouses take a leading role in arranging the marriage but the choice of whether to accept the arrangement remains with the prospective spouses.

Forced marriage is a form of child abuse, domestic abuse and violence against women. It is a violation of children’s rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and is an abuse of human rights. It should form part of existing child and adult safeguarding protection structures, policies and procedures.

Forced marriage is primarily an issue of violence against women and girls. Most cases involve young women and girls aged between 13 and 30 years, although, evidence suggests that as many as 15 per cent of victims are male.

If a family has to resort to violence or emotional pressure to make someone get married, that person’s consent has not been given freely, and therefore it is a forced marriage

‘So Called Honour Based Violence’
Honour related violence occurs when perpetrators believe a relative or other individual (such as a boyfriend) has shamed the family or damaged the family’s honour/izzat and they believe that the only way to redeem the family’s honour is to punish or kill the relative or other individual. There are strong links between such abuse, domestic violence and forced marriage.

Forced marriage cases can develop to the extent that women and men need protection from their family and extended relatives. It is common for individuals being forced to marry to experience being forced to travel abroad, being kidnapped, being physically and mentally abused and in extreme cases being subjected to a so called “honour killing” for bringing shame onto the family by refusing to consent to the marriage.

1 Izzat: an Urdu word which means the honour or reputation of a person, organization, or institution
How can honour / izzat be damaged?
- Defying parental authority
- Becoming ‘westernised’ in style of clothes, make-up, behaviour and attitudes
- Women having sex / relationships / pregnancy outside marriage
- Use of drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes
- Gossip – family honour can be damaged by rumour and gossip that is not true but believed to be true by other members of the community
- Interfaith relationships
- Leaving a spouse or seeking a divorce.

What are the consequences of damaged honour?
- Ostracism / disownment of the victim by their family and community
- Physical / emotional abuse of the victim by family members, spouse and in laws
- Restriction of freedom/loss of independence for the victim
- Isolation from their family and community, but also being on ‘house arrest’ or kept from seeing friends
- Internalisation of guilt / shame by the victim and feeling conflicted for not wanting the marriage but also not wanting to hurt or shame their family
- Forced marriage
- Murder.

The extent of the problem in the UK
The national prevalence of reported cases of forced marriage in England is estimated to be between 5,000 and 8,000 per year\(^2\).

Between January and June 2009, the Forced Marriage Unit at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office dealt with 770 cases, which is an increase of more than 16% from the previous year. These numbers are broken down as follows:
- 70% Pakistani origin, 11% Bangladeshi origin
- 33% under 18; 14% under 16
- 14% involved males\(^3\)

The majority of cases of forced marriage encountered in the UK involve South Asian families, which is due to the size of the South Asian population in the UK, rather than this being an issue specific to this community. There are also cases involving families from Iraqi Kurdistan, East Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Africa and within Czech Roma communities.

Motives behind Forced Marriage
Parents who force their children to marry often justify their behaviour as protecting their children, or preserving cultural or religious traditions. They often do not see anything wrong with their actions. Many young people live their entire childhoods with the expectation that they will marry someone their parents select. Some may not be aware that they have a fundamental human right to choose their own spouse.

Some of the key motivations that have been identified by practitioners working with victims of forced marriage are to:

\(^2\) Forced Marriage, Prevalence and Service Response (Department for Children, Schools and Families; Research Report DSCF – RR128, July 2009)
- Control unwanted sexuality or behaviour including perceived promiscuity particularly the behaviour and sexuality of women/girls, or being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender,
- Prevent ‘unsuitable’ relationships, e.g. outside the ethnic, cultural, religious or caste group
- Protect family honour and pride / izzat, respond to peer group and family pressure
- Fulfil long-standing family commitments and strengthen family links
- Protect perceived cultural ideals
- Protect perceived religious ideals which are misguided because every major faith group condemn forced marriage (see box below)
- Ensure care for a child or vulnerable adult with special needs
- Assist claims for UK residence and/or citizenship
- Financial gain, and to protect land, property and wealth.

These motivations help us to understand why parents might force their children to marry, but they cannot be used as a justification for denying their children their human right to choose their own marriage partner.

Every major faith group, including Islam, Sikh, Hindu and Christian, condemns forced marriage and all require freely given consent as a prerequisite for a valid marriage to take place

**Aggravating factors**
There is evidence that there are factors which increase the risk of someone being forced into marriage, some of which are as follows:
- Bereavement within a family. Occasionally when a parent dies, the remaining parent feels an urgency to ensure that the children are married
- When a step parent moves in with the family
- When an older child (particularly a daughter) refuses to marry, younger female siblings may be forced to marry to protect the family honour or fulfil the original contract
- When a women or girl discloses sexual abuse. Parents may feel that marriage will restore the family honour, or stop the abuse.

**Potential warning signs or indicators of Forced Marriage**
These indicators are not exhaustive and whilst the factors detailed below may be an indication that someone is facing a forced marriage, it should not be assumed that it is forced marriage simply on the basis of someone presenting with one or more of the warning signs. These warning signs may indicate other types of abuse that will also require a multi-agency response.

**Education**
- Withdrawal of student from school by those with parental responsibility
- Removal from day centre for person with physical or learning disability
- Sudden announcement of engagement to a stranger
- Prevented from going on to further/higher education
- Truancy, persistent absences
- Request for extended leave or student not returning from a visit overseas
- Fear or concern expressed about forthcoming school holidays
- Surveillance by siblings/cousins at school
- Decline in behaviour, engagement, performance or punctuality, and poor exam results particularly for a student who was previously motivated
### Health
- Accompanied on visits to doctor, midwife and/or clinics
- Self harm and/or eating disorders
- Attempted suicide
- Depression
- Isolation
- Drug use, alcohol misuse
- Early or unwanted pregnancy
- Female genital mutilation (an offence under The Female Genital Mutilation Act, 2003)

### Family History
- Siblings forced to marry
- Early marriage of siblings
- Self harm or suicide of siblings
- Death of a parent
- Family disputes
- Domestic violence and abuse
- Running away from home
- Unreasonable restrictions, e.g. house arrest, or never permitted to leave home unescorted
- Financial restrictions, e.g. not given access to own money or bank account

### Employment
- Poor performance
- Poor attendance
- Limited career choices
- Unable to attend business trips or functions
- Not allowed to work
- Subject to financial control, e.g. confiscation of wages
- Always accompanied to and from work
- Unable to be flexible in working arrangements

### Police Involvement
- Victim or other siblings reported as missing
- Reports of domestic violence / abuse, harassment or breaches of the peace in the family home
- Reports of other offences such as rape or kidnap
- Victim reported by family for alleged offences, e.g. shoplifting or substance misuse
- Threats to kill and attempts to kill or harm
- Acid attacks
- Female genital mutilation (an offence under The Female Genital Mutilation Act, 2003)

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### Best Practice Guidance on dealing with cases of forced marriage and/or honour based violence
In dealing with cases of forced marriage and/or honour based violence, it is important to take a victim centred approach. Practitioners should listen to the victim and respect their wishes as much as possible, including those of children and young people. On occasions when the victim wishes to take a course of action that may put them in danger, the risks should be explained to them, and appropriate child or adult protection precautions taken if necessary.

Cases rarely present as forced marriage and/or honour based violence and the victim (especially children and young people) will usually not mention either forced marriage or honour based violence

Disclosures of forced marriage should not be dismissed as merely a family matter and should be taken seriously.

- See the victim alone, in a secure, private place, even if they want others present
- Explain all options to the victim but respect their wishes and ensure their safety is taken into account
- Get advice from a Forced Marriage Specialist and/or the Police’s Public Protection Unit
- Activate child or adult safeguarding protection procedures, if the adult is a vulnerable adult.
- Reassure the victim of confidentiality
- Initiate strategy discussions under child or adult protection procedures and involve the victim in these strategic discussions
- Consider the need for immediate placement away from the family
- Refer to Police Public Protection Unit at Northumbria Police.

**Staff should not:**
- Treat allegations as a domestic issue
- Send the victim back to the family home as part of routine child protection procedures
- Ignore what the victim has told you
- Dismiss out of hand the need for immediate protection
- Contact the family in advance of enquiries either by phone or in person
- Breach confidentiality unless it is necessary to ensure safety
- Approach the victim’s family, friends or those who have influence within the community without the express permission of victim
- Use friends, relatives, community leaders or neighbours as interpreters even if they give you reassurances of their support for the victim
- Share information outside of child or adult protection protocols without the express permission of the young person
- Attempt mediation, reconciliation or family counselling.

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In cases of force marriage and honour based violence some of the principles and guidance for working with children and families may inadvertently place the victim at greater risk of harm. This includes the principle that the best place for a child or young person is with his/her family and the practice of attempting to resolve cases through family counselling, mediation, arbitration and reconciliation.

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**If a victim is being taken overseas**

Some forced marriages take place in the UK with no overseas element while others involve a partner coming from overseas or a British citizen being taken abroad.

When a victim is being taken overseas, often it is an education or health professional rather than the Police or Social Care staff who hear about the travel plans. If foreign travel with the family becomes unavoidable the following precautions should be taken:

- Gather information about their travel plans: dates, places where they will be staying, full names of who they will be travelling and staying with, and any phone numbers
- Get a copy of their passport
- Get names and addresses of extended family in the UK and overseas and any known phone numbers, including their parents and any siblings
- Give them details of the nearest British Embassy or Consulate
- Advise them to take emergency cash in the local currency, and a hidden mobile phone if possible
- Date of proposed wedding, if known
- Name of potential spouse and any of their family members including parents and siblings, if known
- Find out if they have dual nationality and explain the implications
- Find out their return date and ask them to contact you immediately they return to the UK
- Get information that only they will be aware of (to facilitate their identification)
- Ask them for a written statement stating that they want the police, Adult Services, Children’s Social Care, a teacher or other third party to act on their behalf if they do not return by a certain date
- Contact the Community Safety Unit and/or Forced Marriage Unit for specialist advice if needed

### The One Chance Rule
Practitioners working with victims of forced marriage and honour-based violence need to be aware of the One Chance Rule. That is, they may only have one chance to speak to a potential victim and thus they may only have one chance to save a life. All practitioners working within statutory agencies need to be aware of their responsibilities and obligations when they come across forced marriage cases. If the victim is allowed to walk out of the door without support being offered, that one chance may have been wasted.

### Dual nationality
If a person is a British national and also holds the nationality of another country, they are considered to be a dual national. This can mean that when the individual is in the country of their other nationality, the authorities in that country will not recognise that the British Embassy or High Commission has any right to assist them or may not permit any assistance to be given.

However, where the Foreign and Commonwealth Office considers that there is a special humanitarian reason to do so, it will consider offering assistance to dual nationals in the country of their other nationality.

### Legal Position
Although there is no specific criminal offence in England and Wales of ‘forcing someone to marry’, criminal offences may be committed such as:
- Threatening behaviour
- Assault
- Kidnap
- Abduction
- Theft (e.g. passports)
- Rape.

There are a number of civil and family orders that can be made to protect those threatened with, or already forced into a marriage:
- An application for a care or supervision order for a child under The Children Act 1989
- Wardship proceedings may be issued in the High Court
- Adults can seek an order for protection from harassment or non-molestation
- Forced Marriage Civic Protection Orders can be sought under the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007
- Annulment of the marriage or divorce
- Court of protection proceedings for vulnerable adults.
For **advice, information and guidance** on dealing with cases of forced marriage and/or honour based abuse/violence, consult with:

The Forced Marriage Unit  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
Old Admiralty Building, London SW1A 2PA  
020 7008 0151 (Mon – Fri; 9am – 5pm)  
fmu@fco.gov.uk

For out of hours emergencies phone:  
020 7008 1500 and ask to speak to the Global Response Centre

To access and print off a PDF copy of the Forced Marriage Unit's:  
**Multi-agency Practice Guidelines: Handling cases of Forced Marriage**  
double click on this link:  

This provides detailed best practice guidelines for:  
- Health Professionals  
- Schools, Colleges & Universities  
- Police Officers  
- Children’s Social Care  
- Adult Social Services  
- Housing for Local Authorities

**Local & national organisations supporting victims** of forced marriage & honour based abuse

- **Panah** Black and Minority Ethnic women and their children experiencing and/or fleeing domestic violence  
  0191 284 6998 (24 hours)

- **Safe Project** Female and male victims/survivors of forced marriage and honour based violence Residents of New Deal Area and west end  
  0191 226 1155

- **Karma Nirvana** Female and male victims/survivors of forced marriage and honour based violence (based in Derby)  
  01332 604 098

- **Honour Network Helpline** National Helpline for victims/survivors of forced marriage and honour based violence staffed by survivors  
  0800 5999 247

- **CHOICE helpline** Operated by Northumbria Police for victims/survivors of forced marriage and honour based violence  
  0800 5 999 365 (Freephone)