

Forced Marriage

What is it?

A forced marriage is where one or both people do not (or in cases of people with learning disabilities, may not be able to) consent to the marriage and some elements of pressure or abuse are used. The pressure put on people to marry against their will can be physical (including threats, actual physical violence and sexual violence) or emotional and psychological (for example, when someone is made to feel like they're bringing shame on their family). Financial abuse (taking your wages or not giving you any money) can also be a factor. In the UK Forced Marriage is seen as a form of violence against women, men and children which cannot be justified on religious or cultural grounds. It is a criminal offence to force someone to marry.

Reasons given to justify a Forced Marriage include:

- Cultural or religious traditions;
- As a means of controlling unwanted behaviour including promiscuity or being gay or lesbian;
- Protecting 'family honour';
- Responding to peer group or family pressure;
- Protecting religious and cultural ideas which are misguided;
- Preventing 'unsuitable' relationships e.g. outside the ethnic, cultural religious or caste group;
- Assisting claims for residence and citizenship;
- Fulfilling long-standing family commitments.

Signs that a person is at risk of or has been a victim of a forced marriage include:

- Missing school/ Decline in performance or punctuality/ Low motivation at school;
- Being withdrawn from education by those with Parental Responsibility and /or requests for extended leave;
- Not allowed to attend extra-curricular activities;
- Self harm and attempted suicide/Eating disorders/Depression;
- Female Genital Mutilation;
- Social Isolation;
- Siblings forced to marry;
- Family disputes;
- Unreasonable restrictions e.g. house arrest;
- Other young people within the family reported missing;
- Reports of domestic violence or abuse or breaches of the peace at the family home;
- The individual reported for offences e.g. shoplifting or substance misuse;
- Unreasonable financial control, for example confiscation of wages/income.

Who is involved?

79% involved female victims, 21% involved male victims. Victims can be any age, from any background and include children and young people.

What should practitioners do? Awareness, disclosure and response

The *One Chance Rule* is that sometimes there will only be one chance to help a person facing forced marriage.

Concerns about a child or young person under 18 should be referred to Children's Social Care Services using Child Protection referral processes through MAST (see below). Concerns about forced marriage should not be discussed with the young person's family or friends, and/or information should not be shared with other agencies without the express consent of the young person, unless it is necessary to protect the young person and is in accordance with the Information Sharing and Confidentiality Procedure.

Concerns relating to those aged 18 and over should be reported to the police. If the person has needs for care and support, and is unable to protect themselves as a result, a safeguarding concern should also be raised with the Safeguarding Adults Team.

Who are the key contacts and who can provide more information?

In an emergency ring the Police on 999.

For children & young people call MAST (Multi-Agency Screening Team): 01422 393336

For adults call Gateway to Care on: 01422 393000.

Out of hours call the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) on: 01422 288000.

For advice and support call the call the Police on 01422 337013 or Calderdale Staying Safe (Domestic Abuse Support Service) on 01422 323339

The Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) has a confidential helpline 020 7008 0151.

Forced Marriage procedures for West Yorkshire can be found here:

http://westyorkscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_force_marr.html?zoom_highlight=forced+marraige