

What is a  
**forced**  
**marriage?**



**What is a  
forced  
marriage?**

**A forced marriage** is where one or both people do not (or in cases of people with learning disabilities, cannot) consent to the marriage and pressure or abuse is used. It is an appalling and indefensible practice and is illegal in Great Britain. It is recognised as a form of violence against women and men, domestic/child abuse and a serious abuse of human rights.

A marriage must be entered into with the free and full consent of both parties; you should feel you have a choice.

An arranged marriage is not the same as a forced marriage. In an arranged marriage, the families take a leading role in choosing the marriage partner, but both parties are free to choose whether to enter into the marriage or not.

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 some case people may be taken abroad without knowing that they are to be married. When they arrive in that country, their passport(s)/travel documents may be taken to try to stop them from returning to the UK.

**If you or someone you know is being forced into a marriage, help and advice is available.**

## What to do...

If you or someone you know is being forced into marriage either in the UK or abroad, you can contact the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU).

The FMU provides information and assistance to potential/ actual victims and frontline professionals. It works with partner organisations, both in the UK and overseas, to ensure that action is taken to try to prevent a forced marriage taking place – in the most extreme instances this involves rescue and repatriation. The FMU also provides support and information to individuals who have already been forced to marry.

All caseworkers in the FMU have experience in dealing with the cultural, social and emotional issues surrounding forced marriage.

The FMU can offer advice and support to anyone in the UK regardless of nationality. However, overseas British Embassies, High Commissions and Consulates can only provide consular assistance to British nationals, and in certain circumstances to an EU or Commonwealth national (but not in the country of their own nationality).

### You can call:

**(+44) (0) 207 008 0151** Monday – Friday 9-5pm

**(+44) (0) 207 008 1500** Global Response Centre (out of hours)

**You can email: [fmu@fco.gov.uk](mailto:fmu@fco.gov.uk)**

**[www.gov.uk/forced-marriage](http://www.gov.uk/forced-marriage)**

## You are not alone

**When you are caught in this situation it is not unusual to feel completely alone... but you are not. Each year, hundreds of cases are reported to us and there are many, involving men, women and the LGBT community, that don't get reported.**

### CAMILLE'S STORY

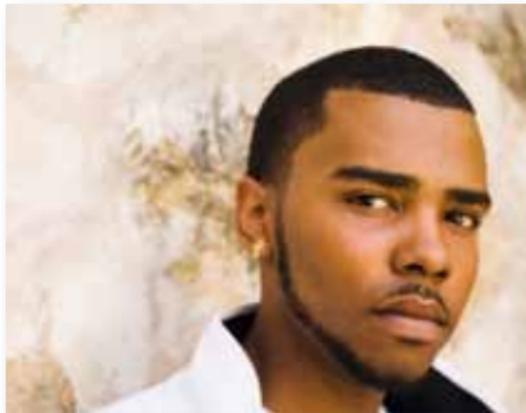
*I was 16 when my dad took me to Afghanistan. He told me it was to visit my grandfather who was sick but when we got there it was all about marriage. I was told straight away that I was to wed my cousin, Samir in two weeks time. He was my uncle's eldest son and 7 years older than me. I felt sick. I told my dad I was too young, I wanted to go home, back to school and my friends but he said it had been decided years ago, there was no negotiating.*



Camille called her friend to say what was happening and she told her teacher. The teacher called the Forced Marriage Unit. They arranged for an order to be served on her mum in England to ensure her safe return to the UK. Camille lived with her parents with the order in place. She is now a graphic designer and is living independently.

## BEN'S STORY

*My family had no idea that I was gay, something that they would never accept because where they are from, it is still illegal and for them, it is a terrible 'sin' to commit. I can't help who I am and always thought, once I moved out and went to university, I would explain to them who I was and*



*that I wasn't going to change. I miss my family, but I deserve to live my life for me and if they can't accept that, it's their loss, not mine.*

Luckily Ben's university began to be concerned when

he failed to return to classes and called the police. They went to his home and said he needed to be seen in person for a welfare check at the British Embassy. Ben stayed in a men's refuge for a month when he came back. He passed his exams and now enjoying his new life. He needed a lot of counselling and still sees someone but he is glad that help was available when he needed it.

## NATASHA'S STORY

*I was forced into marriage by my parents when I was 14 to a man I had never met, he must have been about 23 or 24... way too old. I don't want to talk about it even now, but he abused me and raped me. I never even kissed a boy before; it was worst experience of my life. After it was over, my parents told me it was time to celebrate and be happy. I ran away to my friend's house. Her mum answered the door. She called the police. Whilst I didn't want my parents to get into trouble because until that day they had always been so nice to me, I was told that some things are too serious to let go of.*



Natasha was happy that the Police believed her and that the law is there to protect children. She is now living with a foster family and moving on with her life and her education.

## MALCOLM'S STORY

*I'm Susan, Malcom is my dad. He is 75 and over the last 5 years has become very ill with Alzheimer's disease and his dementia is very bad. He cannot remember even the most basic of things like where he lives and how to make breakfast. Last summer I was told by his neighbour Pamela that she had booked a holiday for them and they are in love and will get married when they get back. I couldn't believe it. When I asked dad about the situation he couldn't remember saying yes to a trip but thought a holiday might be nice. When I mentioned marriage, he couldn't recall what that word meant.*



Susan wasn't sure this would be classed as a forced marriage so she called the FMU to ask.

They explained that because it would appear that Malcolm does not have mental capacity to consent to marriage, there is no need for evidence of coercion or pressure as it is a criminal offence if a person lacks mental capacity. A capacity assessment was carried out. He didn't have capacity and the decision was made for the Police to take action.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## What happens when I call the FMU Helpline?

You will speak to an experienced caseworker who will listen and offer you support and information that is tailored to your individual circumstances. They will give you information on your rights and the services available to you. We will not contact your family.

## I want to leave home but I cannot afford it. How is being homeless with no money a better life than a forced marriage?

There are refuges available for men, women, families and couples. There are also specialist services for LGBT individuals. Refuges are safe environments where you can receive practical help with access to counselling, welfare benefits and more permanent housing. You will be encouraged to become independent and to make your own decisions about your future. To find available refuge spaces you can call the National Domestic Violence Helpline.

## How can you guarantee my safety?

While we cannot guarantee your safety, we can put you in contact with agencies whose job it is to help safeguard you. You should always ring the Police if you are in immediate danger. Refuges can provide you with somewhere safe to stay if you choose to leave home.

## If I think I might be forced to marry when I go abroad, what should I do?

Think carefully before you decide to go abroad. Once you are abroad, it will be much harder to get help. If you do decide to travel contact the FMU for advice about your options abroad. You should fill out the information at the back of this booklet and leave it with a trusted friend or the FMU. If you are a British passport holder, you should also take the address and contact numbers of the nearest British High Commission/Embassy in the country you are visiting (call the FMU or go to **<https://www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations>**). Make sure you programme these numbers into your mobile phone.

Take some money in pounds and local currency, a mobile phone with international credit and a copy of your ticket and passport. Make sure you keep these items safe and hidden.

## What happens if I am abroad and realise that I am being forced into a marriage?

You or a trusted friend should contact the nearest British Consulate, Embassy or High Commission for assistance. They will liaise with the FMU on how best to assist you.

### **What happens if I'm abroad and manage to run away, but I don't have enough money to fly home?**

If you haven't got the money, and you can't borrow it from a friend or relative, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office may be able to loan you the money for a ticket but you will have to pay this back when you get home.

### **How long will it take before I can come back to the UK and where will I stay while arrangements are being made?**

We will try to make arrangements for you to come back as soon as possible. However, if you do have to stay abroad for any length of time, we will try to find you a suitable safe place to stay.

### **If I am abroad, what will happen if I don't have my passport?**

Provided you are a British national, we can issue you with an Emergency Travel Document, once we are satisfied of your identity.

### **I got married overseas, is my marriage valid in the UK?**

If your marriage is seen as legally valid in the country where it took place, in many cases, it will be valid in the UK. You must talk to a solicitor, regardless of whether you had a religious or civil marriage. Religious divorce is not legally valid in the UK.

## **Can you still help me if I'm under 16?**

Yes we can. Please call the FMU to discuss these options.

## **My family are being abusive and threatening me with violence if I don't go through with the marriage, what should I do?**

Your personal safety is of the utmost importance. If you ever feel that you are in any danger you should contact the Police. The police will be able to assess your situation and advise about your personal safety. They can also refer you to other support organisations.

## **Can I get legal protection to prevent the marriage?**

Yes. Forced marriage is now a criminal offence in England & Wales. If you are being forced to marry you now have the option to seek legal protection through the civil courts or the Criminal Justice System.

When considering ways in which to protect yourself you can now choose whether to take the civil route to seek a Forced Marriage Protection Order, or to go to the police and pursue a prosecution through the criminal court. You can also choose to do neither of these things.

Forced Marriage Protection Orders can be used to prevent someone from being forced into marriage or to protect someone if a forced marriage has already taken place. A

person may be arrested if they breach an order. For more information about these orders you can call the FMU or go to **<http://hmctsformfinder.justice.gov.uk/courtfinder/forms/fl701-eng.pdf>**

If you want to pursue a prosecution it means that those who have attempted to force you into marriage, or have forced you, could be sent to prison for a maximum of seven years.

If you have any concerns please call the FMU for further advice and support.

### **I was forced into a marriage overseas; can you refuse my spouse a visa to come here?**

UK Visas & Immigration may be able to depending on your particular circumstances. However, you might need to state publicly that you do not want your spouse to join you in the UK. Call the FMU and we can advise you on what we can do to help.

## Organisations that can help

**As well as the Forced Marriage Unit, there are a number of organisations that can give you confidential advice and information.**

### National services

Police in an emergency	999
Police in a non-emergency	101
National Domestic Violence Helpline (24 Hour Freephone)	0808 2000 247
Childline	0800 1111
Samaritans	0845 790 9090
Shelter (for housing advice)	0808 800 4444
Stonewall Housing (LGBT housing advice)	0207 359 5767
Men's Advice Line	0808 801 0327

### General advice

Southall Black Sisters	0208 571 9595
Newham Asian Women's Project	0208 472 0528
Ashiana Project (London)	0208 539 0427
Ashiana (Sheffield)	0114 255 5740
Karma Nirvana	0800 5999 247
Henna Foundation (Cardiff)	029 2049 6920
Iranian & Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO)	0207 920 6460
Respond (learning disabilities)	0207 383 0700
Forward (for African women)	0208 960 4000
Shakti Women's Aid (Edinburgh)	0131 475 2399
Freedom Charity	0845 607 0133
London Lesbian & Gay Switchboard	0207 837 6768
Imaan (LGBT Muslim community)	0203 393 5188

## Information to leave with a trusted friend or the FMU

If you are worried that you or someone you know may be taken abroad, the information below should be recorded and kept safe. If you/they need assistance, this information will be essential.

- > Name and date of birth as shown on passport
- > Passport number (with date and place of issue)
- > Overseas contact details and address of where you'll be staying
- > Number of secret mobile phone taken overseas
- > Address and telephone number (including mobile) in the UK
- > A recent photograph
- > Contact details of a trusted third party in the UK
- > Parents' names and address
- > Departure and expected return date (copies of tickets if possible)
- > Names of those you are travelling with
- > Names of any family members remaining in the UK
- > Any other useful information such as any secret code words

---

## Information to take with you

**Forced Marriage Unit: +44 (0) 207 008 0151**

High Commission/Embassy – Address & Telephone number

Passport number:

Name and address overseas:



HM Government



### **The Forced Marriage Unit is open:**

Monday – Friday 9.00am - 5.00pm      0207 008 0151

Out of hours Global Response Centre      0207 008 1500

Email: [fmu@fco.gov.uk](mailto:fmu@fco.gov.uk)

Website: [www.gov.uk/forced-marriage](http://www.gov.uk/forced-marriage)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/forcedmarriage](http://www.facebook.com/forcedmarriage)

Twitter: @FMUnit

### **Forced Marriage Unit**

King Charles Street

Foreign & Commonwealth Office

London

SW1A 2AH