



**WHAT IS A  
FORCED  
MARRIAGE?**

## WHAT IS A FORCED MARRIAGE?

A marriage must be entered into with the full and free consent of **both** people. Everyone involved should feel that they 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. The marriage is entered into freely by both people.

However, in some cases, one or both people are **'forced'** into a marriage that their families want. A forced marriage is a marriage conducted without the valid consent of both people, where pressure or abuse is used.

You might be put under both physical pressure (when someone threatens to or actually does hurt you), or emotional pressure (for example, when someone makes you feel like you're bringing shame on your family) to get married.

In some cases people may be taken abroad without knowing that they are to be married. When they arrive in the country their passports may be taken by their family to try and stop them from returning home.

FORCED marriage is an abuse of human rights, and a form of domestic violence and child abuse.

**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 Forced Marriage Unit is there to help people who are being forced into marriage. The FMU's caseworkers understand the issues, the family pressures and how difficult it is to talk about these situations.

**The Forced Marriage Unit offers confidential support and information.**

**You have a right to choose... and the Forced Marriage Unit is there to help you.**

***You can:***

**Call** ***(+44) (0)20 7008 0151***  
between 9am and 5pm  
Monday to Friday

***Emergency Duty Officer*** (out of office hours)  
***(+44) (0)20 7008 1500***

**Or e-mail:** ***fmu@fco.gov.uk***

***Find out more about the work of the Forced Marriage Unit at: [www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage](http://www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage)***

---

## 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, more than 250 cases of forced marriage are reported to us.



### NARINA'S STORY

now 21

*"I felt that I had no option. Once they had taken me out of the country there was nothing I could do. I had no contact with anyone but the family. My mother was caught between my feelings and the community's expectations. They made me feel that I would dishonour my family if I didn't marry him."*

Narina was 18 when her parents took her back home for a family holiday. She was kept in the family home and wasn't allowed out on her own. Finally, she and her sister managed to run away and contacted the British Consulate, who found her a place to stay and helped her contact her friends in the UK. She eventually came home and with the help of a women's refuge and her friends, has built a new life for herself and her sister.

---

Around 85% of those cases involve women who have been forced into marriage and some 15% of cases involve men. And there are many more cases – involving both men and women – that don't get reported.



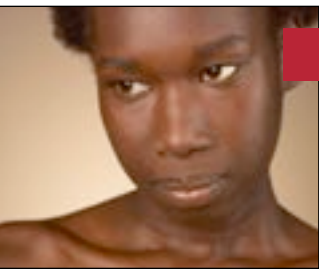
### **RAJ'S STORY**

**now 29**

*"People don't realise that men can also find themselves in this situation. I don't know if I could have told anyone even if I'd had the chance to. It's not exactly macho, is it, admitting that you were held hostage by your family and forced to marry someone you'd never even met..."*

Raj was forced into a marriage. When he'd finally returned to the UK, it took him 3 years to get out of it. He may have been able to avoid the financial and emotional turmoil of divorce if he had known about the support and help at hand.

---



## **SOLA'S STORY**

**now 24**

*"My parents took me back home, saying they wanted me to learn more about our culture and to experience life there. I had no idea they had marriage planned for me. If I had known I would have run away or found help earlier."*

Sola thought she was going overseas to find out more about her culture. However, when she arrived, her family told her that she had to get married. After the marriage she managed to come back to the UK with help from the British Consulate. She has been going to counselling to help her cope with depression and anxiety.

---



## LENA'S STORY

now 19

*"My father found out that I had a boyfriend and that changed everything in our family. He literally kept me prisoner in the house, wouldn't let me see my friends and then started planning my wedding – to a man I had never met! He said that I had to follow our customs, and there would be no discussion. I didn't have any other way out..."*

When Lena's father found out about her boyfriend, he was so angry that he cut off her hair. He told her that having a boyfriend was against their culture. She would have to marry the man he chose and have a virginity test. Lena was so scared that she took an overdose. Fortunately she recovered in hospital.

---

---

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### ***What happens when you call the FMU helpline?***

You will talk to an experienced caseworker who will listen and offer you confidential support and information. You can discuss your options with them. We can give you information on your rights and the services available to support you. **We will not contact your family.**

### ***I can't afford to leave home. So, how is being homeless with no money a better life than a forced marriage?***

If you are a woman, you can go to a refuge. A refuge is a safe environment which can provide you with emotional and practical help such as access to counselling, and sorting out benefits and housing. You will be encouraged to become independent and to make your own decisions about your future. If you are male, call us to discuss your options.

### ***How can you guarantee my safety?***

While we cannot guarantee safety, we can put you in contact with agencies whose job it is to help protect you. You should always call 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 into a marriage when I go abroad, what should I do?***

Think very carefully before you decide to go abroad. Once you are abroad, it will be much harder to get help. **If you decide to go, please contact us at the FMU and give us the information at the back of the leaflet.** Make sure you take the address and contact numbers of a trusted friend and of the High Commission / Embassy in the country you are visiting (call the FMU for this number or go to [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)) and keep them somewhere safe. Take some money with you in pounds and in the local currency, a spare mobile phone and a copy of your passport and tickets.

***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. They will contact the FMU in the UK and arrange for assistance.

***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 in some circumstances be able to loan you the money for a ticket. But you'll 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 and 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 place to stay.

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

Provided you are a British national, we can issue you with an emergency passport.

***I got married overseas. Is my marriage valid in the UK?***

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

---

**If you are going abroad make sure you keep this information with you and also send a copy of it to us at the FMU.**

**If you're worried that you or someone you know may be taken abroad, please provide us with the following information for you or them:**

- **Name and date of birth as shown on passport**
- **Passport number (with the date and place of issue)**
- **Overseas contact details and address of where you'll/they'll be staying and other relatives you/they may be visiting when abroad**
- Address and telephone number (including mobile phone number) in the UK
- A recent photograph
- Contact details of someone you trust in the UK
- Parents' names
- Departure and expected return dates
- Who you/they are travelling with, and your/their family members staying in the UK

**High Commission/Embassy - Address/Telephone:**

**Your Passport Number:**

**Date of Issue:**

**Name and address of relative in country you are visiting:**

**Forced Marriage Unit: (+44) (0)20 7008 0151**

**E: [fmufco.gov.uk](mailto:fmufco.gov.uk)**

## 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

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Police in an emergency</b>                                     | <b>999</b>                                   |
| <b>National Domestic Violence Helpline</b><br>(24 hour Freephone) | <b>0808 200 0247</b>                         |
| <b>NSPCC Child Protection Helpline</b>                            | <b>0808 800 5000</b>                         |
| <b>Asian Family Counselling Service</b>                           | <b>020 8571 3933</b><br><b>020 8813 9714</b> |
| <b>Shelter</b> (for housing advice)                               | <b>0808 800 4444</b>                         |

### GENERAL ADVICE

|                                     |                      |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Southall Black Sisters</b>       | <b>020 8571 9595</b> |
| <b>Newham Asian Women's Project</b> | <b>020 8472 0528</b> |
| <b>Ashiana Project</b> (London)     | <b>020 8539 0427</b> |
| <b>Ashiana</b> (Sheffield)          | <b>0114 255 5740</b> |

**Contact the FMU for details of regional services or go to [www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage](http://www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage)**

The **Forced Marriage Unit** is open:  
Monday – Friday from 9.00am – 5.00pm

Call us on: **(+44) (0)20 7008 0151**  
**Emergency Duty Officer** **(+44) (0)20 7008 1500**  
**(limited service only)**

Or email: **[fmufco.gov.uk](mailto:fmufco.gov.uk)**

**Forced Marriage Unit, G55, Consular Human Rights, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Old Admiralty Building, London SW1A 2PA**

**[www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage](http://www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage)**