

Forced marriage



Forced marriage – definition

‘A forced marriage is a marriage in which one or both spouses do not (or, in the case of children and some adults at risk, cannot) consent to the marriage and duress is involved. Duress can include physical, psychological, financial, sexual and emotional pressure’.

Forced marriage is more likely to involve women, and an estimated 85% of cases referred to the UK Government’s Forced Marriage Unit involve women. However, both men and women may be vulnerable to forced marriage and should be entitled to the same level of help.

The UK Government’s guidelines make clear the important distinctions between a forced marriage and an arranged marriage:

‘An arranged marriage is one in which the families of both spouses take a leading role in arranging the marriage but the choice whether or not to accept the arrangement remains with the prospective spouses’.

Characteristics that may indicate forced marriage

While individual cases of forced marriage, and attempted forced marriage, are often very particular, they are likely to share a number of common and important characteristics, including:

an extended absence from school/college, including truancy; a drop in performance or sudden signs of low motivation; excessive parental restriction and control of movements; a history of siblings leaving education to marry early; poor performance, parental control of income and students being allowed only limited career choices; evidence of self-harm, treatment for depression, attempted suicide, social isolation, eating disorders or substance abuse; and/or evidence of family disputes/conflict, domestic violence/abuse or running away from home.

On their own, these characteristics may not indicate forced marriage. However, it is important to be satisfied that where these behaviours occur, they are not linked to forced marriage.



The role of schools

Schools should ensure that they are able to respond effectively and swiftly to concerns about forced marriage. It is critical that arrangements in respect of forced marriage at school level include support staff as well as teachers, as they are likely to have a key role to play in dealing with forced marriage and will be in contact with pupils and their families as frequently as teachers.

It is important that all members of staff recognise the presenting symptoms, how to respond if there are concerns and where to turn for advice.

All concerns need to be raised as a “child concern” with

Richard Reeve, Tash Good or Imran Iqbal

For further information please see Richard Reeve

