

Forced Marriage Awareness Factsheet

This factsheet provides essential guidance on identifying and responding to forced marriage. It is intended for use in staff training and awareness raising within health and social care settings.

Forced marriage is a crime. It is extremely serious and involves wide ranging risks to an individual, but can also pose risks to others as well.

A forced marriage is a marriage in which one or both people aged over 18 have the mental capacity to be married but are coerced and forced into it, or where a person lacks the mental capacity to be married (regardless of whether any coercion or force is applied). Force can include physical, psychological, financial, sexual and emotional pressure. A person can be at risk of forced marriage if they are due to be married or have already married. A person under 18 will be deemed as subject to a forced marriage even if they are willing and consenting to be married.

It is important to recognise that forced marriages are not to be confused with arranged marriages, which are legal if both adults are willing and able to consent to the marriage. An arranged marriage can become a forced marriage, however, if there is any form of coercion on the person to marry.

People who draw upon health and social care support – those with, or appearing to have, care and support needs - will be particularly vulnerable because they are likely to rely on their families for care, may have communication difficulties and may have fewer opportunities to tell anyone outside their family about what is happening to them.

It is unlikely that a forced marriage (including plans for this) will openly be acknowledged by the person or others. However, it is important to be aware of some signs that could indicate that a forced marriage has occurred or is due to occur. Forced marriage is often part of a wider pattern of abuse, and there could be a range of physical and behavioural observations about the person and also the behaviour and actions of those involved with them that raise concerns.

Some warning signs to be mindful of include:

- A person appearing depressed, anxious, worried or withdrawn.
- Evidence of self-harm, attempted suicide, social isolation, eating disorders or substance abuse.
- Unexplained and extended absences from work, college, or school, poor performance, and low motivation.
- Isolation and distancing from social groups and professional involvement.
- Excessive and unreasonable restrictions (on contact, finances, phone use etc.) and control of movements from others.
- Always being accompanied during visits with others and at health appointments (with reluctance of others to let the person be seen alone).
- Evidence of family disputes, domestic abuse, running away from home, or going missing.

- Sudden plans for a holiday with no apparent reason.

This isn't an exhaustive list and any person at risk of being forced to marry may react and show signs differently. It is also important to be aware that just because some of these signs are present, doesn't mean a person is at risk of a forced marriage, although it may indicate the person is at risk of other forms of abuse.

Conversely, there may be situations where a person or a friend or family member explicitly shares that a person has been forced to marry, or you are informed that a person has been married – or there are plans for their marriage – and you have reservations about whether the person is able to freely consent to this.

Where you do have grounds to suspect that a forced marriage risk is present, it is important to act responsibly and to avoid taking any action that could put the person or others at further risk. There is a risk that the forced marriage will be expedited if a family becomes aware that action is being taken. Forced marriage cases can involve a variety of complex and sensitive issues that should be handled by a child or adult protection specialist, who, where possible, should also have additional expertise in forced marriage.

In situations where a forced marriage risk is identified, please ensure that your organisation's safeguarding procedures are followed in the first instance, which will include raising a safeguarding concern with Bradford Council and/or contacting the police in emergency situations. Further advice can also be sought from the government's Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) by phone on 020 7008 0151 or by email at fmu@fcdof.gov.uk.

For further reading and helpful links:

The government have produced [Multi-agency statutory guidance for dealing with forced marriage and multi-agency practice guidelines: Handling cases of forced marriage](#), which provides greater detail on understanding forced marriage and the actions that can be taken in response to this. In particular sections 7, 13 and 16 apply to those working with people within an adult social care context.

There is a Forced Marriage Resource Pack available, designed to highlight examples of best practice and to help ensure that effective support is available to victims of forced marriage:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/forced-marriage-resource-pack/forced-marriage-resource-pack>.

The FMU webpage on the government website contains a host of additional information, guidance and resources: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/forced-marriage>.

For a list of organisations that provide specialist support and advice to victims or survivors of domestic abuse, please see the Bradford District domestic abuse and sexual violence information webpage for further information - [Useful contacts - Bradford DASV](#).