



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. The two people involved should feel that they have a choice.

With forced marriage, one or both of the people involved are forced into a marriage against their will and without their permission.

An arranged marriage is not the same as a forced marriage. In an arranged or assisted marriage, the families take a role in choosing and introducing the marriage partners. The marriage is entered into freely by both people.

Some people from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-gendered (LGBT) community may decide to enter a marriage of convenience. This is not the same as a forced marriage. A marriage of convenience is when both partners enter freely into a marriage that is mutually beneficial. Reasons for a marriage of convenience vary, but they often include issues of sexuality and immigration.

However, one or both of the people can sometimes be 'forced' into a marriage that members of their families want. A forced marriage is conducted without the valid consent of one or both people, and pressure or abuse is used. This could include both physical pressure (when someone threatens to or actually does hurt you) or emotional pressure (for example, when someone tries to make you feel that your sexuality brings 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 returning home.

Forced marriage is an abuse of human rights and a form of domestic violence; sometimes it can also be child abuse.

## 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 helps and advises people who are being forced into marriage. The FMU's caseworkers understand the issues that people from the LGBT community can face, including the family pressures and how difficult it is to talk about these situations. They do not judge.

The FMU offers confidential support and information and can also put you in touch with LGBT organisations that can support you. You have a right to choose, and the FMU is there to help you.

You can:

call **(+44) (0)20 7008 0151**

between 9am and 5pm,  
Monday to Friday

Emergency Duty Officer  
(outside office hours)

**(+44) (0)20 7008 1500**

or e-mail **[fmu@fco.gov.uk](mailto:fmu@fco.gov.uk)**

find out more about the work of the FMU at  
**[www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage](http://www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage)**

*“Although I am gay, I wasn’t really ‘out’ for a long time. I felt ashamed that as a man I was being forced into a marriage, and that my family was being violent with me. It was horrible for me and the girl I was forced to marry.”*



## **SUKHVINDER'S STORY**

Sukhvinder is now 27

Sukhvinder was told that a relative was ill and was tricked into going to India. Once there, his family took his mobile phone, passport and money. The male members of his family told him that they knew about his sexuality, and that he would have to remain in India and marry a girl already chosen for him from the village. When he refused, they beat him.

Sukhvinder managed to contact the British Consulate in India, who helped him return to the UK. Once home, the FMU put Sukhvinder in touch with organisations that have worked with him around issues of sexuality, depression and stress.

*"I was under a lot of pressure to do the 'right thing'. My mother and my family used my faith against me — they knew that if I took an oath on the Koran, I would keep it. All that mattered to them was what people thought."*



## **YASMIN'S STORY**

Yasmin is now 34

Yasmin was 20 years old when she went to Pakistan with her mother during her university holidays. Yasmin had told her mother that she was a lesbian. On arrival, she was locked in a room and told that she would have to marry her cousin. Despite attempts to escape, she was kept locked up for a month, and gained her freedom only after she took an oath on the Koran that she would agree to marry someone in the UK, which she did on her return.

Later, when Yasmin left the marriage, she was disowned by her family. Her ex-husband went on to blackmail Yasmin and her mother.

Had Yasmin known about the support and help that the FMU can offer, she may have been able to get help sooner and avoid the emotional confusion of forced marriage and divorce. Today, Yasmin has re-established a relationship with her mother and completed her studies.

*“My family were shocked and very angry when they found out I was gay. They were violent towards me and called me names. My mother tried to calm things but couldn’t. I felt guilty that I had caused them pain and let them down. They made me feel as if I owed them. They really believed that if I married who they wanted, I would stop being gay.”*



## **FARHAN'S STORY**

Farhan is now 24

Farhan thought he could make things better by doing as his family wished. He travelled with them to the Middle East, where he was forced into a marriage. On his return to the UK, Farhan's father would not let him go out without a family member or talk to his friends. His father threatened to kill him if he ever heard anything about Farhan being gay again.

Farhan ran away and later tried to commit suicide. Through support, Farhan has moved away from his hometown and is now going to university.

*“So many lives have been ruined by my forced marriage. I don’t talk to my family – I miss my brother and sisters, but most of all my mother. When my father and uncles found out that I was a lesbian, I thought I was going to die – that they were going to kill me. Being forced into a marriage is like being sold to be raped.”*



## **MAYA’S STORY**

Maya is now 19

Maya’s friends called the FMU when she did not return from a trip out of the country. The FMU together with the British Consulate managed to find Maya and help her return to the UK safely.

With the help of a women’s refuge and her friends, Maya has built a new, independent life for herself.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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

An experienced caseworker will discuss your options with you, confidentially. They will give you information on your rights and the services available to support you. We will not contact your family or discuss your sexuality with anyone.

### **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 that 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. For women, 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 travel abroad, as once you are there it will be much harder to get help. If you decide to go, please contact the FMU before you travel and give us the information at the back of this leaflet. Make sure that 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 sterling and in the local currency, as well as 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 as soon as possible.

### **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 cannot borrow it from a friend or relative, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office may be able to loan you the money for a ticket.

### **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 always try to find you a suitable place to stay.

### **If I am abroad, what will happen if I do not 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're worried that you or someone you know may be taken abroad and forced into a marriage, 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 the address of where you/they will be staying and other relatives you/they may visit 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 in the UK

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High Commission/Embassy – Address/Telephone

Your passport number

Date of issue

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Name and address of the relative in the country you are visiting

## ORGANISATIONS THAT CAN HELP

As well as the FMU, there are a number of organisations that can give you confidential advice and information:

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### NATIONAL SERVICES

Police in an emergency	999
National Domestic Violence Helpline (24-hour, freephone)	0808 200 0247
NSPCC Child Protection Helpline	0808 800 5000
Shelter (for housing advice)	0808 800 4444
Stonewall Housing (for housing advice)	020 7359 5767

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### INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

Foreign & Commonwealth Office	020 7008 1500
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Visit [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk) for a list of overseas UK Embassies and their contact details.

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### GENERAL ADVICE

London Lesbian & Gay Switchboard	020 7837 6768
Naz Project London	020 8741 1879
Positive East	020 7791 2855
Karma Nirvana	01332 604098
Honour Network	0800 5999247
Imaan	07507 453664

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Contact the FMU for details of regional services, or go to

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

The FMU is open from Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

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