

Forced marriage

A forced marriage occurs when one or both people involved do not (or in cases of people with learning disabilities, cannot) consent to the marriage and pressure or abuse is used. It is recognised in the UK as a form of violence against women and men, domestic/child abuse and a serious abuse of human rights.

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 instance, when someone is made to feel they are bringing shame on their family). Financial abuse (taking a person's wages or denying the person money after marriage) can also be a factor.

In the UK, it mostly applies to people or families originating from the Indian sub-continent, from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Cultural practices differ vastly across the sub-continent, further complicated by a diversity of religious faiths and social/cultural beliefs, and educational abilities. Many older parents tend to stubbornly believe that it is their moral responsibility to ensure the eternal well-being of siblings including their partners. The cultural upbringing of many such parents also believes that the knot once tied is till death 'do them part'. Such beliefs are not necessarily those of the younger generation with a western upbringing and freedom leading to possible inter-generational conflict.

Forced marriage when occurring abroad, if one of the parties is a British national, can also be used as a device to try to make application to the Home Office for entry into the UK for the spouse.

In 2005, a Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) was set up between the Home Office and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, with the aim of providing support and advice to victims of forced marriage. In 2012, the FMU gave advice or support to possible forced marriages in 1,485 cases. Slightly fewer numbers were helped in the years 2013 and 2014 - see tabulation. However, only small numbers of persons have so far been prosecuted for this offence in England and Wales, in recent years only about 40+ a year, with a conviction rate of about 70%. Women made up about 10% of those prosecuted. (Ref: CPS, VAWG, Forced Marriage, Prosecutions by outcome, Tables 2, 3 and 6).

The FMU operates a public helpline to provide advice and support to victims of forced marriage as well as to professionals dealing with cases. The assistance provided ranges from simple safety advice, through to aiding victims to prevent their unwanted spouse moving to the UK ('reluctant sponsor' cases), and, in extreme circumstances, to the rescue of victims held against their will overseas.

The FMU undertakes an extensive outreach and training programme of about 100 events a year, targeting both professionals and potential victims, and media campaigns.

In the UK, *the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014* makes it a criminal offence to force someone to marry. This includes:

- Taking someone overseas to force them to marry (whether or not the forced marriage takes place)
- Marrying someone who lacks the mental capacity to consent to the marriage (whether they are pressurised or not)
- Breaching a *Forced Marriage Protection Order*

The civil remedy of obtaining a *Forced Marriage Protection Order* through the family courts continues to exist alongside the new criminal offence, so that victims can choose how they wish best to be assisted.

The highest proportion of cases dealt with in the UK are in the London area

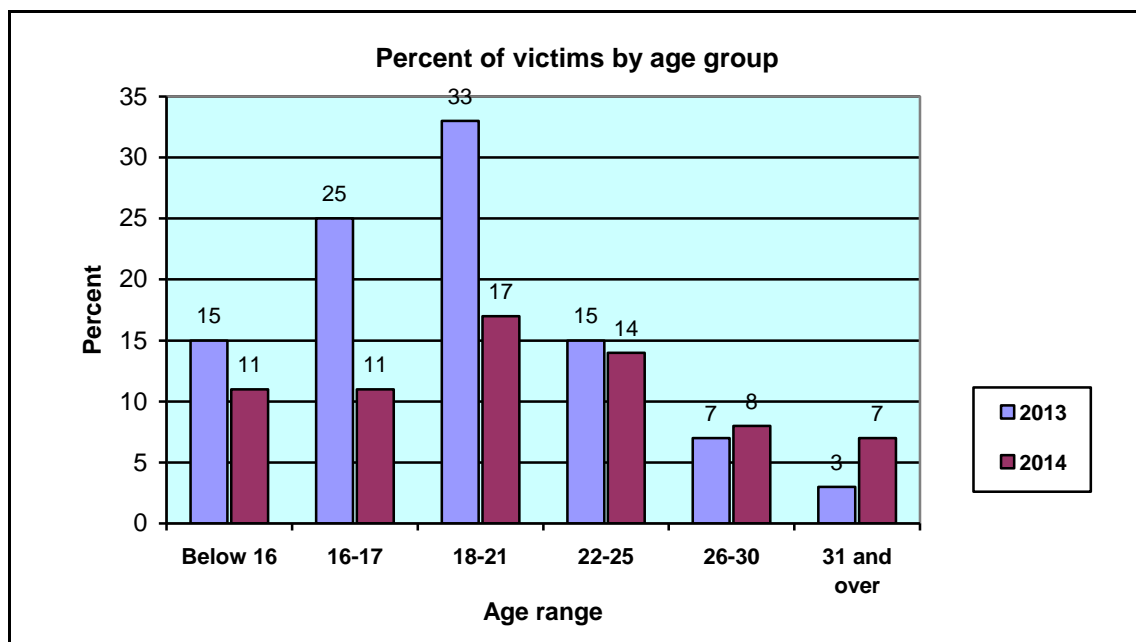
UK Forced Marriage Statistics

Category	Year	
	2013	2014
Total cases - numbers	1,302	1,267
Involving female victims %	82	79
Involving male victims %	18	21
Age of victim (where known) % of total		
Below 16	15	11
16-17	25	11
18-21	33	17
22-25	15	14
26-30	7	8
31 and over	3	7
Age not known	?	32
Cases handled with no overseas element - %	?	23
Countries - total involved % of total	74	88
Pakistan	42.7	38.3
India	10.9	7.8
Bangladesh	9.8	7.1
Afghanistan	2.8	3
Somalia	2.5	1.6
Turkey	-	1.1
Iraq	1.5	0.7
Sri Lanka	-	1.1
Nigeria	1.1	-
Saudi Arabia	1.1	-
Yemen	1	-
Iran	0.8	1
Tunisia	0.8	-
The Gambia	0.7	-
Egypt	0.6	-
Morocco	0.4	-
Origin unknown	5.4	3.5
UK regional distribution - %		
London	24.9	23
West Midlands	13.6	11.9
South East	9.9	10.8
North West	9.3	8.1
Yorkshire & Humberside	6.8	8.9
East Midlands	4.2	4.4
East Anglia	3.5	4.7?
Scotland	2.9	2.3
North East	2	1.3
South West	1.6	1.7
Wales	1.6	1.4
Northern Ireland	0.3	0.7
Region unknown	19.4	20
Disabled victims - cases	97	135
LGBT victims - cases	12	8

Sources:

Statistics January to December 2013, Forced Marriage Unit, Home Office, London
 Statistics January to December 2014, Forced Marriage Unit, Home Office, London

Age profile of UK victims



PARITY
November 2015