I CHOOSE

A BETTER FUTURE
GOOD ENOUGH
COMPLIANCE
FAMILY HONOUR
THE ONE

LET'S TALK ABOUT FORCED MARRIAGE
Introduction

In the UK, adults have the right to marry from the age of 18. They can decide when and who they want to marry, if they want to get married at all.¹

A forced marriage is where people don’t get to choose. Someone might be pressured to get married even though they don’t want to. Or they don’t fully understand what a marriage is, for example because of a learning disability. And if one of the people getting married is under the age of 18, it’s a forced marriage even if there is no pressure and the parents agree.²

And that is why forced marriage is different from arranged marriage. In an arranged marriage, the people who are getting married agree to have their marriage arranged, and they agree who they’re going to marry and when. They also have the freedom and choice to end the arrangement at any point.³ In a forced marriage, people don’t have that choice. One or both of them are pressured to get married and do not give free and full consent.

Forced marriage is illegal in the UK. It is a crime and people can go to prison for it.⁴ A forced marriage protection order can protect a person threatened with or in a forced marriage.⁵

But forced marriage still happens. In 2022, around 300 people asked the UK Forced Marriage Unit for advice. Approximately 30% of the cases involved children.⁶ The International Labour Organisation, Walk Free and the International Organization for Migration estimated that at least 22 million people were in a forced marriage worldwide in 2021. 41% of them were children and 87% of all children who were forced into marriage were girls.⁷

It is common for there to be multiple perpetrators involved in a forced marriage. They can be male and female family members, friends and members of the community.

¹ Schedule 1, Article 12, Human Rights Act 1998.
³ Childline, ‘What if you’re being forced into marriage’.
Even though forced marriages are more common in some communities than others, they happen to people of any colour, ethnicity, culture, religion, and nationality. For example, people at risk of forced marriage can come from Bangladesh, India, Iraq, Kenya, Pakistan, Romania and Somalia. They can be Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, or Sikh.\(^8\) But not every member of those communities experiences forced marriage and all major religions are against the practice.

Forced marriages can happen for many reasons, for example because people are worried about family reputation and honour. Many people also still try to justify forced marriage as part of their traditions and beliefs and think that it is their obligation to comply. And forced marriages can happen because people want to pay off a family debt or ensure what they consider to be a better future for their children; because they don’t want their children to have relationships or sex before marriage; or because they don’t approve of their child being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.\(^9\)

Forced marriage doesn’t have to lead to unhealthy and abusive relationships. But they can have a negative effect on people’s physical and mental health and well-being, on their education and career, and on their social life.\(^10\) When a person is sold to their future spouse, forced marriage can be an institution or practise similar to slavery. Forced marriage can be a form of modern slavery when a person cannot refuse or leave the marriage, for example because of violence, coercion, threats, and/or abuse of power.\(^11\)

To protect human rights, we are all responsible to learn about forced marriage and to challenge it. And that is why we made this comic. We want the comic to be used to educate young teenagers about forced marriage and to empower them to become allies of those at risk or already experiencing forced marriage. We hope that it helps to build communities where people who care about each other look out for their loved ones.


The stories in this comic show examples of different types, causes and consequences of forced marriage and focus on possibilities for resistance and intervention. They are informed by true stories, academic research, and the expertise of Hannah Baumeister (Lecturer in Law, Liverpool John Moores University), Alex Carabine (Research Assistant, Liverpool John Moores University), Helen McCabe (Associate Professor in Political Theory, University of Nottingham), Catherine Kirk (Relationship and Sex Education Consultant), Karma Nirvana (especially Rowen Fletcher and the Survivor Ambassadors), Savera UK (especially Afrah Qassim), and Savera UK Youth. Ruth Gangneux and PSHE Ambassadors of Nottingham Girls’ Academy (Zeeneth Araf, Aliyah Bahkressa, Dakota Berry, Yasmin Duri, Mansi Hirani, Sidrah Hussain, Mialouise Nunn, and Sabiyah Rani), and Anja Koermer and students from Childwall Sports and Science Academy (Sonny Aiken, Mia Bradshaw, Michael Danson, and Valentina Getchevski) also helped to create the comic. The comic is the artistic creation of Emma Brown from Touch the Sun. The project is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (Project Reference: AH/X004325/1). More information about it can be found at https://drawingon.blog/.

If you want to talk about forced marriage or need help, contact:

- Childline (if you are a young person): call 0800 1111
- Forced Marriage Unit: call 020 7008 0151, email fmu@fcdo.gov.uk
- Karma Nirvana: call 0800 5999 247, Monday - Friday 9 am - 5 pm; email support@karmanirvana.org.uk
- The police: call 999 in an emergency situation; call 101 if it is not an emergency
- Savera UK: call 0800 107 0726, Monday - Friday 10 am – 4 pm


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12 UK Research and Innovation, ‘Drawing on Forced Marriage: Teaching Tough Topics Through Comics’. 
SABS: I'd like to meet someone who is tall, smart and funny. Someone I can trust.

ROMAN: I want to find my soulmate, aunty. Somebody who's kind. Somebody who's caring.

MATCHMAKER: I'll find the right person for you.
Spin the Wheel

She's the one!

Do not bring shame upon us.

You must marry her.

Such a fussy girl.

You've said no three times now. You have to say yes to someone.

I will do as you wish.

No, not that one.

I'm getting bad vibes from her, aunty.

He is everything I ever wanted in a partner, and more.

What is your decision?

The Matchmaker
SO, ARRANGED MARRIAGE IS WHEN A PERSON ASKS SOMEONE ELSE, FOR EXAMPLE A FAMILY MEMBER OR A MATCHMAKER, TO FIND A PARTNER FOR THEM. BUT THEY WILL ONLY GET MARRIED IF THEY AGREE. THEY CAN SAY NO AT ANY TIME.

AND FORCED MARRIAGE IS WHEN A PERSON DOES NOT HAVE A CHOICE. THEY ARE EXPECTED OR PRESSURED TO GET MARRIED EVEN IF THEY DON’T WANT TO. THEY CAN’T SAY NO.

WHICH IMAGES SHOW AN ARRANGED OR A FORCED MARRIAGE?
They say marriage is beautiful.

And they have a point, right? Marriage is nothing to be afraid of.

It makes sense to get married so that my future husband can help me.

I can't be a burden for my parents forever.

I owe them, they've done so much for me.

They say it doesn't matter that I'm 16... and my future husband is 23.

They say a man who is respected in the community would take care of me.
This will be you soon, Azedah.

And here is your future husband.
AZEDAH?
ARE YOU OK?

AZEDAH...
YOU CAN TALK
to us. We love you
and just want to
know if you’re
OK.
Mum, Dad... I don't want to get married yet...

I just want to focus on school and maybe go to uni after...

That's OK. Marriage can wait, you're still young.
YOU HAVE FIVE MINUTES LEFT UNTIL THE END OF THE EXAM.
I'm so proud of you, Azedah. Well done.

And now that you've finished your education...
Mum and Dad are getting on, leaving them and just living my life the way I want to. Just isn't an option.

And the way they supported me through uni.

I guess now it's my turn.

OK Dad, you can arrange a meeting with Jay.

I knew you would see sense, Azedah.

You know our dads actually met at uni?
LOOK AT US NOW. AND YOU DIDN'T WANT ME AT FIRST
YOU CAME TO REPAY THE MONEY THAT I LENT YOU.

PLEASE, I NEED A BIT MORE TIME.

I HAVE ALREADY GIVEN YOU MORE TIME!!

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!!

YOU ARE GOING TO BRING ME THE MONEY BY THE TIME I CLOSE THE SHOP TONIGHT OR ELSE...

BUT I DON'T... I CAN'T...

I DON'T HAVE THE MONEY...

I GIVE YOU MY DAUGHTER IN MARRIAGE YOUR DEBT IS REPAYED.
Hi, you alright there love?

I'm fine, thanks.

Oh, pardon me.

Hi, I'm Sam. Do you mind if I put this poster up?

It's for the organisation I work for. We raise awareness about honour-based abuse.

3,000 incidents of honour crime are reported each year in the UK.

Speak Out.

Saverauk.co.uk

Come into the office. We'll find somewhere safe for you and your baby to stay.

We can help find a lawyer and options for professional training, if you'd like.

But for now, fancy a cuppa?

So these are your options right now.
THE FRIEND

FORCED MARRIAGE CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE AT ANYTIME, REGARDLESS OF THEIR GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR ETHNICITY. IT’S THEREFORE REALLY IMPORTANT THAT EVERYONE IS FAMILIAR WITH THE SIGNS OF FORCED MARRIAGE, SO THAT WE CAN WORK TOGETHER TO PROTECT OURSELVES AND OUR FRIENDS

SIGNS OF FORCED MARRIAGE

* DOMESTIC ABUSE
* BROTHERS OR SISTERS WHO HAVE BEEN MARRIED WHEN THEY WERE REALLY YOUNG
* HAS TO STAY HOME AND IS NOT ALLOWED TO SPEAK TO OTHER PEOPLE
* NO (FINANCIAL) INDEPENDANCE
* STOPS COMING TO SCHOOL
* FAMILY AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS CONSTANTLY CHECK UP ON THEM
* POOR GRADES
* DECLINE IN BEHAVIOUR
* SEEMS WORRIED, DOWN, NOT INTERESTED IN ANYTHING
* DOES NOT REALLY WANT TO TALK
* GOING MISSING
* DISAPPEARS FROM OR DOESN’T UPDATE SOCIAL MEDIA

HELP AND SUPPORT

IT CAN BE SCARY IF A FRIEND FINDS THEMSELVES IN A DIFFICULT SITUATION, ESPECIALLY IF IT’S THEIR FAMILY WHO IS CAUSING THEM DISTRESS. UNDERSTANDABLY, YOU WILL WANT TO HELP YOUR FRIEND, BUT IT’S ALSO REALLY IMPORTANT THAT YOU KEEP YOURSELF SAFE, TOO. THAT’S WHY WE’VE PUT TOGETHER THIS LIST OF ADVICE FOR HOW TO HELP A FRIEND WHO IS AT RISK OF FORCED MARRIAGE. WE’VE ALSO DIVIDED IT INTO THREE SECTIONS. THE FIRST IS THE SIMPLEST AND MOST ACCESSIBLE, THE SECOND IS IF YOU ARE ABLE TO OFFER A BIT MORE HELP, AND THE THIRD IS IF YOUR FRIEND MIGHT BE IN IMMEDIATE TROUBLE. WE KNOW THAT IT CAN BE OVERWHELMING, BUT WE WANT TO GIVE YOU LOTS OF CHOICES SO THAT YOU’RE EMPOWERED TO MAKE THE BEST DECISION FOR BOTH YOU AND YOUR FRIEND.
FIRST SECTION: ACCESSIBLE

- Ask your friend if they’re feeling OK, or if there’s anything worrying them at the moment.
- If your friend is worried, take it seriously.
- Listen carefully and allow them to speak freely.
- Reassure them. For example, say “It’s not your fault.”
- Do not quiz them.
- Do not make assumptions or jump to conclusions.
- Ask them what they want to do next and who they want to ask for help. For example, a teacher or another adult they trust, or KARMA NIRVANA (0800 5999 247), SAVERA UK (0800 107 0725), or the police.
- Don’t speak to their family or community, though.

SECOND SECTION: MEDIUM

- Agree to a secret code so that you know it’s your friend messaging and not someone else who uses their phone and social media. For example, choose a secret nickname or a special way to say it.
- Agree to a safe word or phrase that your friend will use if they need help but that will sound normal if they’re overheard. For example, “What’s up with aggie,” you might also choose an image they could share to their social media that would act as a signal for help.
- Tell your friend to keep their phone charged at all times in case they need to call for help.
- Suggest that your friend switchoes off their mobile phone location settings and the “Find My Phone” feature.
- Suggest your friend change their social media passwords.

THIRD SECTION: IF YOUR FRIEND IS IN IMMEDIATE TROUBLE

- Always ask an adult for help.
- This advice is especially relevant if your friend’s family is planning a holiday abroad.
- Find out the date they’re scheduled to return home. If they’re not back by this date, agree on a person you could tell (a teacher, your parents, or the police).
- Try to get the name and address of where your friend will be staying.
- Try to make a copy of their passport number, or take a clear photo of their passport.
- Take a picture of your friend with your phone.
- Ask them to memorise your phone number, as well as the phone number of the Forced Marriage Unit (0044(0)20 7008 0151)

We know it can be a really scary situation, for you as well as your friend. That’s why we want to reassure you that any help you can offer is valuable and worth while, even if it feels as simple as asking your friend if they’re ok, and then finding someone who can help them.
**THE BIGGER PICTURE**

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* RIGHT TO MARRY
* RIGHT TO LIFE, SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT
* RIGHT TO HEALTH AND HEALTH SERVICES
* RIGHT TO EDUCATION
* RIGHT TO ACCESS OF INFORMATION FROM THE MEDIA
* RIGHT TO LEISURE, PLAY AND CULTURE
* FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION
* PROHIBITION OF DISCRIMINATION
* PROHIBITION OF TORTURE OR INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT
* PROHIBITION OF SLAVERY, FORCED LABOUR, AND CHILD LABOUR
* PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE, ABUSE AND NEGLECT