

# HPSP FACT SHEET

# CHILD MARRIAGE



## HARMFUL PRACTICES: DEFINITION AND CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Harmful Practices are forms of violence which have been committed primarily against women and girls in communities and societies for so long that they are considered, or presented by perpetrators, as part of accepted 'cultural' practice. In these cases, religion, culture, patriarchal codes of behaviour and perceived notions of 'honour' are used by one or more perpetrators as an excuse for coercive control, threats and abuse. The most common are forced or early marriage, so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C) and other lesser reported forms such as faith-based abuse, menstrual huts, acid attacks, so called 'corrective' rape and others. Harmful practices occur across all sexes, sexual identities and genders. They are not unique to a culture or religion. Often one and more forms of harmful practices occur at the same time, escalating risks and resulting in barriers to disclosure.

The notion of 'honour' is as relevant in broader discussions on coercive control and other forms of violence against women and girls globally. It is important that we understand this continuum while distinctively understanding the specific risks (such as multiple perpetrators) and needs of women from BME backgrounds who experience so called 'honour' based abuse and harmful practices. In the UK 'honour' based abuse and harmful practices definitions are shaped by the experiences of global majority/BME women's barriers to access, institutional racism and the specific contexts of escalation of risk in migrant and diaspora communities. Therefore, within the multiagency coordinated community response model of domestic abuse, harmful practices and so called 'honour' based abuse response is more effective when defined, informed and delivered by led by and for BME/global majority women's organizations.

## WHAT IS CHILD MARRIAGE?

Child marriage is "any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child" (UNICEF). From 27th February 2023 the legal marriage age in England and Wales increased from 16 to 18. This expands the offence of forced marriage to include anything intended to cause a child to marry before they turn 18, even if there is no coercion involved. Girls who marry before they turn 18 are less likely to remain in school and more likely to experience domestic abuse. Young teenage girls are more likely to die due to complications in pregnancy and childbirth than women in their 20s, and their children are more likely to be stillborn or die in the first month of life. Pregnancy and childbirth are especially dangerous for adolescents

# HPSP FACT SHEET

# CHILD MARRIAGE



since they are not physically mature, which increases the risk of obstructed labour and obstetric fistula[1].

Child marriage often overlaps with other forms of abuse, such as dowry abuse, so called 'honour' based abuse, FGM, virginity testing, hymenoplasty and domestic abuse.

## **WARNING SIGNS AND INDICATORS INCLUDE BUT NOT LIMITED TO:**

- Self-harm, depression, attempted suicide, eating disorders.
- Restriction in movement, e.g., not allowed out to see friends.
- Truancy from school or being kept off school.
- Running away from home.
- Removed from school or prevented from going onto higher education.
- Always being chaperoned by family members.
- Surveillance by siblings, other family members, or members of the community.
- Isolation including lack of friends, access to phones or internet.
- Substance misuse.
- Having siblings who were forced to marry.
- Arrangements to be taken out of the country at short notice, sometimes due to reported family illness.

# HPSP FACT SHEET

# CHILD MARRIAGE



## DOS AND DONTS

### DO:

- Follow the ONE Chance rule - this may be the only opportunity you have to speak to the victim.
- Be trauma informed in approach and be led by survivors as they are experts by experience.
- Take them seriously and be patient in understanding the dynamics of power and risks.
- Consider that there may be multiple perpetrators.
- Ensure that you see the client alone.
- Use interpreting services to communicate with client.
- Listen to what the victim wants to happen and be honest if you will need to break their confidentiality.
- Establish safe means of contact.
- Offer specialist support (see agency details below).
- Be extremely careful how information is recorded and shielded within your organisation.
- If under 18, follow child safeguarding procedures.
- If over 18, follow adult safeguarding procedures.
- If over 16 consider a MARAC referral.
- **ALWAYS REMEMBER - IN AN EMERGENCY DIAL 999.**

### DON'TS:

- Attempt to mediate.
- Send them away.
- Let the family, community or social network know about the disclosure.
- Meet in a place where you they could be seen by a member of the family/community.
- Use members of the family or community to interpret.
- Underestimate the perpetrator/s.
- Underestimate the risk even if there have been no previous reports.

# HPSP FACT SHEET

# CHILD MARRIAGE



## AGENCIES

**Rights of Women have more information on Forced Marriage Protection Orders (FMPO):**  
[Rights of Women](#)

**Forced Marriage Unit:** 020 7008 0151

**Information on applying for a FMPO:** [FMPO](#)

**Karma Nirvana UK Helpline:** 0800 5999 247

**Respond (support people with learning disabilities or autism):** 020 7383 0700

You can also refer cases and enquire about training on harmful practices via your local P&ACT Ending Harmful Practices Agencies:

**Women and Girls Network - Bromley, Ealing & Hounslow**

Email: [rcc@wgn.org.uk](mailto:rcc@wgn.org.uk) Phone: 0808 801 0660

**Phoenix (P&ACT) Project at PLIAS Resettlement - Barnet, Brent, H&F, Harrow & Ealing**

Email: [shirley.ricketts@plias.co.uk](mailto:shirley.ricketts@plias.co.uk) Phone: 07494 091586 or 0208 838 6800

**Midaye - H&F, Kensington & Chelsea, Westminster**

Email: [contact@midaye.org.uk](mailto:contact@midaye.org.uk) Phone: 07593440944

**FORWARD - Croydon, Bexley, Greenwich & Merton**

Email: [forward@forwarduk.org.uk](mailto:forward@forwarduk.org.uk) Phone: 0208 960 4000

**Southall Black Sisters - Ealing, Hillingdon & Hounslow**

Email: [info@southallblacksisters.co.uk](mailto:info@southallblacksisters.co.uk) Phone: 020 8571 9595

**Ashiana Network - Barking & Dagenham, Havering, Newham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets & Waltham Forest**

Email: [info@ashiana.org.uk](mailto:info@ashiana.org.uk) Phone: 02085390427

**IKWRO Women's Rights Organization - Camden, Enfield, Merton, Southwark & Sutton**

Email: [info@ikwro.org.uk](mailto:info@ikwro.org.uk) Phone: 020 7920 6460

**Kurdish and Middle Eastern Women's Organization - Enfield, Hackney, Haringey & Islington**

Email: [referrals@kmewo.com](mailto:referrals@kmewo.com) Phone: 020 72631027

**Latin American Women's Rights Service - City of London, Haringey, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark & Sutton**

Email: [priscila@lawrs.org.uk](mailto:priscila@lawrs.org.uk) Phone: 020 7336 0888

**Asian Women's Resource Centre - Brent, Barnet, Kensington & Chelsea, Richmond & Harrow**

Email: [info@awrc.org.uk](mailto:info@awrc.org.uk) Phone: 020 8961 6549

**DVIP - Kensington & Chelsea, Kingston upon Thames, Lambeth & Wandsworth**

Email: [DVIP.al-aman@richmondfellowship.org.uk](mailto:DVIP.al-aman@richmondfellowship.org.uk) Phone: 020 8563 2250

**IMECE - Barking & Dagenham, Hackney, Islington, Lewisham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets & Waltham Forest**

Email: [vawgreferral@imece.org.uk](mailto:vawgreferral@imece.org.uk) Phone: 0207 354 1959

# HPSP FACT SHEET

# CHILD MARRIAGE



## REFERENCES

[1] Obstetric fistula is a childbirth injury that has been largely neglected, despite the devastating impact it has on the lives of affected girls and women. It is usually caused by prolonged, obstructed labour, without timely medical intervention—typically an emergency Caesarean section.

([www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/EN-SRH%20fact%20sheet-Fistula.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/EN-SRH%20fact%20sheet-Fistula.pdf))