



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 FORCED MARRIAGE?

A forced marriage is where one or both people do not (or in the case of those who lack capacity, cannot) consent to a marriage as they are pressurised, or abuse is used, to force them to do so. It is recognised in the UK as a form of domestic or child abuse and a serious abuse of human rights. The pressure put on people to marry against their will may include physical, psychological, financial, sexual and emotional abuse. Child marriage is closely linked to forced marriage. Forced marriage often takes place within a context of so called 'honour' based abuse (HBA) and resisting a forced marriage can lead to an escalation of HBA.

HPSP FACT SHEET

FORCED MARRIAGE



Forced marriage can also be linked to modern slavery. Although many victims of forced marriage are in their teens and twenties, forced marriage can happen at any age, for example after the death of a spouse a woman could be forced to remarry.

Forced marriage is illegal in the UK, including where a British national is taken to another country to marry. A Forced Marriage Protection Order (FMPO) is a legal document that can protect individuals from a forced marriage in the UK or from being taken abroad to be married. The order will also help to bring them back to the UK if they are taken out of the country. It can be taken out before or after a marriage takes place and can be taken out against perpetrators in the UK or abroad. A local authority can take out a FMPO if the victim is under 18 or considered vulnerable.

WARNING SIGNS & INDICATORS INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:

- Self-harm, depression, attempted suicide, eating disorders.
- Restriction in movement, e.g. not allowed out to see friends or have a job.
- 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, internet.
- Lack of access to documents such as passport.
- 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

FORCED MARRIAGE



DOS AND DONT'S

DO:

- Follow the ONE Chance rule - this may be the only opportunity you have to speak to the victim.
- Ensure that you see the client alone.
- 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.
- Use interpreting services to communicate with the client if needed.
- Believe the person and ensure their safety.
- Listen to what the victim wants to happen and be honest if you will need to break their confidentiality (e.g. if a child is at risk).
- 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.**

DONT'S:

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

HPSP FACT SHEET

FORCED MARRIAGE



AGENCIES

Rights of Women have more information on FMPOs: [Rights of Women](#)

Forced Marriage Unit: 020 7008 0151

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

Karma Nirvana UK Helpline: 0800 5999 247

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 Phone: 0808 801 0660

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

Email: shirley.ricketts@plias.co.uk Phone: 07494 091586 or 0208 838 6800

Midaye - H&F, Kensington & Chelsea, Westminster

Email: contact@midaye.org.uk Phone: 07593440944

FORWARD - Croydon, Bexley, Greenwich & Merton

Email: forward@forwarduk.org.uk Phone: 0208 960 4000

Southall Black Sisters - Ealing, Hillingdon & Hounslow

Email: info@southallblacksisters.co.uk Phone: 020 8571 9595

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

Email: info@ashiana.org.uk Phone: 02085390427

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

Email: info@ikwro.org.uk Phone: 020 7920 6460

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

Email: 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 Phone: 020 7336 0888

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

Email: info@awrc.org.uk Phone: 020 8961 6549

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

Email: 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 Phone: 0207 354 1959