

Information for Hertfordshire Schools

Forced Marriage & Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

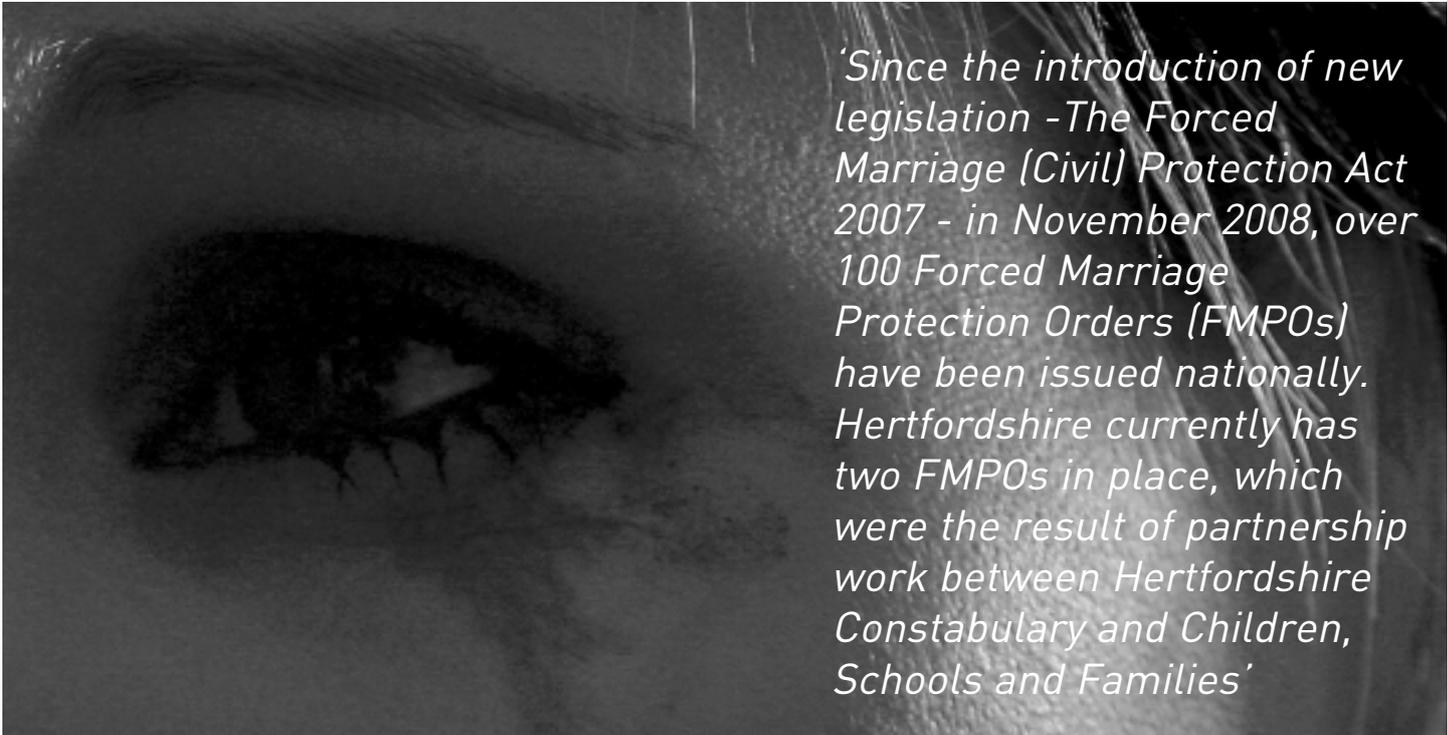


How you can help



HERTFORDSHIRE
CONSTABULARY





'Since the introduction of new legislation -The Forced Marriage (Civil) Protection Act 2007 - in November 2008, over 100 Forced Marriage Protection Orders (FMPOs) have been issued nationally. Hertfordshire currently has two FMPOs in place, which were the result of partnership work between Hertfordshire Constabulary and Children, Schools and Families'

Keeping children and young people safe from all forms of abuse is a top priority in Hertfordshire. There are two

forms of abuse which tend to peak during the school holidays – forced marriages and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

This guidance aims to equip you with the information to help children at risk.

Forced marriage

Whilst the majority of extended visits to family overseas are for valid reasons, every year at least 250 UK residents are forced into a marriage against their will, often by violence, coercion or emotional blackmail. Unlike arranged marriages, where the bride and groom both freely consent to the marriage, forced marriages do not give the bride or groom any choice.

Honour Based Violence

Children may be at risk of violence, harassment from family/community members, and 'home policing' where it is deemed their behaviour has/may have 'shamed' the family.

The types of behaviour which can precipitate this and may also be key motives for forcing the child into marriage are:

- Controlling unwanted behaviour and sexuality (including alcohol and drug use, wearing make-up or behaving in a 'westernised manner', perceived promiscuity or being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender), particularly the behaviour and sexuality of women.
- Preventing 'unsuitable' relationships, e.g. outside the ethnic, cultural, religious or caste group.

Other factors for forcing a marriage include:

- Protecting 'family honour' or 'izzat'.
- Responding to peer group or family pressure.
- Attempting to strengthen family links.
- Financial gain or ensuring land, property and wealth remain within the family.
- Protecting perceived cultural ideas or perceived misguided religious ideals.
- Ensuring care for a child or vulnerable adult with special needs when parents or existing carers are unable to fulfill that role.
- Assisting claims for residence and citizenship.
- Long-standing family commitments.

Forced marriage is a violation of human rights.

You, as a member of school staff, are well placed to help raise concerns and take action to prevent young people from being forced into marriage whilst on extended visits to their parents' home country.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

The Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 makes it illegal to take a child out of the country to have FGM performed abroad. It is estimated that up to 24,000 girls under the age of 15 are at risk of FGM in the UK. Health professionals and teachers are best placed to recognise the symptoms in a child at risk.

Who is at risk of forced marriage or FGM?

Pupils - male or female - from as young as 13 may be at risk of being forced into marriage by parents once out of the UK.

They may be pressurised and then agree to marry one of the prospective candidates without time for reflection. The younger pupils may be betrothed with the expectation that they will enter full married state at a later stage of their lives.

Girls from the age of 8 to 13 years from North African countries and Somalia are also at risk of being taken overseas for female genital mutilation (which may be referred to as: 'female

circumcision'; 'a special ceremony/procedure'; 'cutting' in practising communities).

How can you spot the signs?

When parents/carers make requests for extended holiday leave, consider whether the parents/carers are volunteering information on the following:

- Precise location of where the pupil is going
- The purpose of the visit – is this corroborated by what the child says? Do they know why they are going?
- The return date: is it a firm or an estimated date?
- Do parents know that the school's Attendance Improvement Officer will be notified if the pupil does not return on given date? Do they understand the authorising process and penalties for non-authorized absence? Can they notify a named person by email or text message if there is a change of plans/delay?
- Are the parents aware of the disadvantages to their child of a missed school period or examination?
- What educational provision have parents made for the child/children during extended visit?
- Are there other historical factors to consider such as persistent unexplained absence from school; child not allowed to attend extra curricular activities; close

supervision of child by family/carers?

- FGM – it is difficult to spot the signs for FGM taking place. Professionals should also be alert for indicators that FGM may already have occurred. There may be a prolonged absence from school or other activities with noticeable behaviour change upon return, possibly with bladder/menstrual problems. Children from practising communities may complain about pain between the legs or talk of something somebody did to them that they are not allowed to talk about.

How can I help?

All organisations which may come into contact with potential victims have a statutory responsibility for forced marriages. The Forced Marriage (Civil) Protection Act 2007 states that all organisations should have "a lead person with overall responsibility for safeguarding children, vulnerable adults or victims of domestic abuse – the same person should lead on forced marriage." In schools this would be the designated person for child protection.

For more information, please refer to the Multi-Agency Practice Guidelines: Handling Cases of Forced Marriage published in July 2009. All schools can prominently display posters and leaflets with guidance and contact information for victims of forced marriage. Both are available at www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage

General points to consider

- It is useful for schools to share a common absence request form which asks for information on all siblings who attend other schools. Sometimes younger siblings tell teachers information that has a bearing on older members of the family, so it's important for schools to liaise with each other. Your Child Protection Schools Liaison Officer (CPSLO) will have access to attendance information.
- Parents/carers often require translation or interpretation of absence request forms and explanation of the rules concerning term time holidays. Where head teachers require a meeting with parents to authorise extended absence in term time, this can provide an opportunity to explain the county policy and also to gather important information. There is evidence that such an interview has reduced the number of applications for extended leave of absence.
- Parents/carers sometimes do not know a firm return date due to return flights being booked as last minute availability occurs. Also, the circumstances triggering a trip may necessitate a flexible return date. However, if a date has been specified and a child has not returned to school, normal procedures should be followed for notifying the local education authority.

**** Remember, extreme caution should be taken in sharing information especially if honour based violence is suspected. ****

DO:

- Speak to the victim alone in a secure/private place.
- Recognise and respect their wishes.
- Perform a risk assessment / where possible take the individual's immediate family details in the United Kingdom and abroad if applicable.
- Contact a trained specialist who has responsibility for honour violence/ forced marriage as soon as possible.
- If the young person is under 18, refer them to the designated person with responsibility for safeguarding children and activate safeguarding procedures.
- If allegations are made by children consider immediate Police Protection in order to prevent further immediate and serious harm.

DON'T:

- Send the victim away.
- Approach members of the family or the community unless expressly asked to do so.
- Share information with anyone without their express consent.
- Attempt to be a mediator.



If you have concerns that a child is at risk contact:

Children, Schools & Families (CSF) Assessment Team: on 0300 123 4043 (the customer service centre). State the referral is of high importance so that a response is raised within 24 hours.

Advice is also available from Hertfordshire Constabulary via the non-emergency number: 0845 33 00 222 (request to be put through to a 'specialist' officer in the Harm Reduction Unit).

Other Useful Contact Information

The Forced Marriage Unit [FMU]. This service provides advice and guidance for British nationals being forced into marriage overseas.

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/fco-in-action/nationals/forced-marriage-unit/>

The Unit also provides expert advice to professionals, especially those confronted by it for the first time. Tel 020 7008 0151.

If a situation is urgent, always call 999



Additional Training

Should your school require additional staff training on these issues please contact the County Community Safety Unit (Hertfordshire County Council/Hertfordshire Constabulary partnership) at Farnham House, Stevenage on 01438 757 403. We will be happy to provide free training.