

Forced Marriage Fact Sheet

Everyone has a right to decide whether, when, and whom to marry.

Q: WHAT IS FORCED MARRIAGE?

A: A forced marriage is a marriage to which one or both parties do not, or cannot, consent and in which one or more elements of force, fraud, or coercion are present. Forced marriage can impact individuals of any age, gender, socio-economic status, national origin, and ethnic or religious background.

Q: HOW IS FORCED MARRIAGE DIFFERENT FROM ARRANGED MARRIAGE?

A: In an arranged marriage, the ultimate choice of whether, when and whom to marry remains with the individual, regardless of any matchmaking role played by family members. In a forced marriage, one or both parties may feel powerless to make decisions due to pressure, threats, coercion, or abuse.

Q: IS FORCED MARRIAGE A HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION?

A: Yes, a forced marriage is a violation of human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.” Forced marriage situations often involve additional human rights violations, such as deprivation of education, rape, forced labor, and domestic violence, which can result in severe and long-term harm, including deteriorating medical and mental health.

Q: IS FORCED MARRIAGE A PROBLEM IN THE UNITED STATES?

A: Yes, forced marriage is a serious problem in the United States, impacting individuals of all backgrounds. Forced marriage is not confined to any one religion or cultural group.

Q: HOW PREVALENT IS FORCED MARRIAGE IN THE UNITED STATES?

A: No national estimates of the full extent of the problem have been calculated. However, according to a Tahirih Justice Center national survey on forced marriage, over 500 respondents across almost all 50 states encountered as many as 3,000 known or suspected cases of forced marriage over just a two year period. Data from state marriage records show that between 2000 and 2015, at least 207,468 minors were married in the United States. Many of those marriages were likely to have been forced.

The Tahirih Justice Center Forced Marriage Initiative

The Tahirih Justice Center Forced Marriage Initiative offers assistance to anyone who is trying to avoid or leave a forced marriage regardless of age, race, class, gender, immigration status, nationality, sexual orientation, or religion. We partner with survivors and other advocates to end to forced marriage in the United States through direct services, education, outreach, and public policy advocacy.