

## What is the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)?

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) is comprehensive legislation designed to improve criminal justice and community-based responses to sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking and to increase the availability of services for victims and survivors.

VAWA was first passed by Congress in 1994, and was reauthorized in 2000, 2005, 2013, and 2022, each time making the law stronger and more inclusive.

The 2022 reauthorization of VAWA defined forced marriage for the first time as a form of violence happening in the United States. It recognized forced marriage as both a potential cause and consequence of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

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Contact us via phone, email, or on our website to request a training and learn how you can better identify and respond to cases of forced marriage.

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You are serving survivors of  
**forced marriage**

Whether you know it or not.



## What is forced marriage?

A **forced marriage** is a marriage where 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 be both a cause and a consequence of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking. In some cases, child abuse, human trafficking, and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) can overlap with forced marriage abuse.

Forced marriage is often one part of a spectrum of other harms, and can happen to people of any age, religion, gender, cultural background, or economic status.

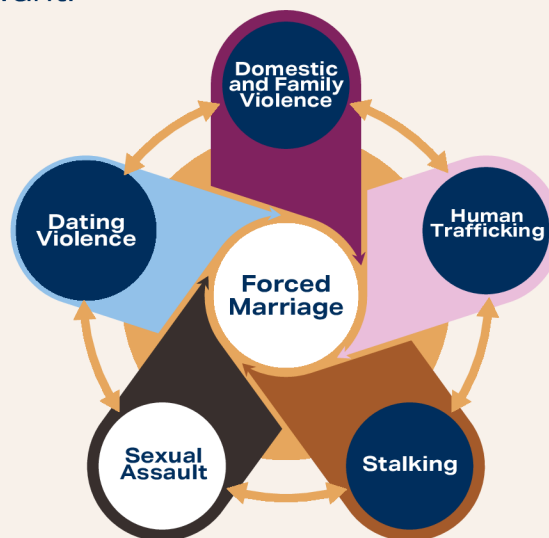


Forced marriage **is not the same** as an arranged marriage, in which families may take the lead, but the ultimate choice to marry remains with the individual. However, under certain conditions, an arranged marriage can become a forced marriage.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the Forced Marriage Continuum, Vidya Sri & Darakshan Raja (2013)

## Forced marriage abuse never happens on its own.

Individuals impacted by forced marriage experience a range of coercive and abusive tactics throughout their lifetime in order to get them to comply with marriage demands, or to force them to remain in marriages they do not want.



In our 2024 field assessment, 78% of respondents reported that they DO NOT trust their screening and intake procedures to identify forced marriage cases. For both service providers and those at risk, early knowledge of the power, control, and coercion leading up to a forced marriage — as well as the potential abuse that may follow — can greatly enhance opportunities for safety, healing, and prevention.

## The Forced Marriage Initiative at the Tahirih Justice Center

The Tahirih Justice Center is a national nonprofit organization serving immigrant survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, forced marriage, human trafficking, and other forms of abuse.

Since 2011, the Forced Marriage Initiative (FMI) has been dedicated to ending forced marriage through a national movement that safeguards the rights of survivors and those at risk. The FMI is the first program in the United States to be recognized as a training and technical assistance provider on the issue of forced marriage by the Office on Violence Against Women.

We can provide:

- ▶ Guidance on intake/assessment protocols to recognize forced marriage within the populations you serve
- ▶ Customized training and 1:1 support
- ▶ Resources and up-to-date information on your state laws
- ▶ Connections to culturally appropriate expert service providers
- ▶ Assistance exploring ways your funding may provide services to forced marriage survivors