



Forced Marriage Fact Sheet

WHAT IS A FORCED MARRIAGE? A forced marriage occurs when an individual is forced, coerced, threatened, or tricked to marry without their informed consent.

HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT FROM AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE? In many cultures, it is customary for families to arrange meetings between their children in the hopes of fostering a voluntary relationship that will lead to a marriage. In such situations, while the initial meetings are arranged by the families and a marriage is encouraged, the ultimate decision regarding whether to marry remains with the couple and the choice to marry is strictly voluntary. In contrast, in a forced marriage, an individual is threatened and/or coerced by her family to enter into the marriage against her will and may suffer honor violence if she resists or refuses the marriage.

DOES THIS HAPPEN IN THE UNITED STATES? Yes. Although this is generally treated as a private family matter that remains hidden from public view, there are numerous reports of girls being taken out of school in the United States in their early teenage years and returned to their parents' home countries to be forcibly married. For example, in 2007, the New York Daily News reported that a number of girls were being forced to return to Pakistan to marry men chosen by their families. One woman recalled being tricked and drugged before being put on a plane to Pakistan and, once there, being forced at gunpoint to acquiesce to a marriage to a man chosen by her father.

The Tahirih Justice Center released survey results in September of 2011 that found as many as 3,000 known or suspected cases of forced marriage within immigrant communities in the United States in the two years preceding the survey. We believe the actual number of forced marriage cases in the United States to be much higher, as the survey was directed only towards service providers and other professionals.

The AHA Foundation conducted a study in partnership with the John Jay College of Criminal Justice looking at forced marriage in New York City. The researchers interviewed CUNY students whose families originated from countries with a high incidence of forced marriage on their experiences with relationships and marriage. Of those students interviewed, 84% knew of at least one person in their social circle who did not want to marry their partner but did so anyway. The likely reason for this disconnect is family conflict over marital choice.

IS FORCED MARRIAGE A CRIME IN THE UNITED STATES? There are only ten U.S. states and territories that have specifically outlawed forced marriage (*source: Tahirih Justice Center*).

California
Oklahoma

Maryland
Virgin Islands

Minnesota
Virginia

Mississippi
Washington,
D.C.

Nevada
West Virginia