

Staying safe overseas

We encourage you to try to remain in the U.S. if you are facing or fleeing a forced marriage. Being overseas puts you at greater risk and makes it extremely difficult to receive help. If you think you may face a forced marriage in another country, reach out to discuss your options before traveling.

Once overseas, simple things like making a phone call can be challenging. The State Department may be able to provide some help, but it only serves U.S. citizens, and its level of assistance can vary by country.

If plans have been made for you to travel overseas, alert those you trust and provide them with information about when and where you will be traveling: location and contact of where you will be staying, your passport information, and your flight/travel details. If you are a U.S. citizen, register with the State Department Smart Traveler Enrollment Program at <https://step.state.gov/step>, which provides the U.S. government with information about you and your travel plans.

You don't have to go through with a forced marriage.



And you don't have to face it alone.

The Forced Marriage Initiative at Tahirih Justice Center

The Forced Marriage Initiative at Tahirih Justice Center is here to provide confidential support to individuals from anywhere in the United States that are facing forced marriages either in the U.S. or overseas. Our services include risk assessment, safety planning, and referrals to agencies in your area that may be able to help.

Direct legal representation and social services are available to individuals facing or fleeing forced marriages in Tahirih's local service areas of Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, DC.

We also provide guidance and technical assistance to service providers (law enforcement, school and university staff, social workers, attorneys, etc.) working with individuals facing or fleeing forced marriage.

Need Help?

Tahirih Justice Center
Forced Marriage Initiative
9 a.m.-5:30 p.m. EST, Monday-Friday

Phone: 571-282-6161
Email: FMI@tahirih.org
Web: preventforcedmarriage.org

* Please contact us via phone, email, or on our website to request a training or speaker on forced marriage.

MARRIAGE IS YOUR CHOICE.

Know the facts. Know your rights.





What is forced marriage?

A forced marriage is one that takes place without the full and free consent of one or both parties. It may be a marriage that is threatened, or one that has already taken place. Forced marriages can happen to people of any gender, age, religion, cultural background, or economic status.

Are forced marriages different from arranged marriages?

Yes. In an arranged marriage, families may take the lead in finding a marriage partner, but the ultimate choice of whether, when, and whom to marry remains with the individual. In a forced marriage, one or both parties feel that they have no real ability to make those choices.

Do forced marriages happen here?

Yes. Forced marriage is a serious problem in the United States. A 2011 national survey by Tahirih Justice Center identified as many as 3,000 cases of forced marriage in a two year period, affecting individuals of diverse backgrounds and faiths from 47 states.

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

Consent and marriage

What can lack of consent look like?

A lack of consent can be caused by a variety of factors, including being under the legal age of consent, being disabled or incapacitated, or being subjected to force, fraud, or coercion. For example, although some minors may agree to be married, they often lack the capacity for informed and meaningful consent. Simply accepting the idea of being married is not the same as consent. Consent also requires an individual to approve of the timing of the marriage, as well as the marriage partner.

What can force or coercion look like?

Often, coercion or force takes the form of psychological or emotional pressure and abuse, being isolated by family, or being threatened with being disowned. It can also include being threatened with or experiencing actual physical violence. These forms of abuse can put tremendous pressure on someone facing a marriage and can compromise an individual's ability to say 'no' to an unwanted marriage.

You have a right to say 'no'

What if I am not 18? Even if you are under 18, no one has the right to force you to marry. We encourage anyone facing or fleeing forced marriage, regardless of age, to reach out to us for support and to discuss ways to stay safe.

As a minor it is important to:

- Understand that certain people (including teachers and counselors) have a legal obligation to report child abuse to authorities, which may lead to discussions with your parents and family members.
- Ask about confidentiality. You have a right to know if information you share will be shared with others.
- Alert those who are helping you if you have concerns or fears about your family's reaction to you seeking help.

Protecting your privacy

Be aware that your communications can be monitored. This can include emails, texts, phone calls, and Internet use. If someone becomes aware of your efforts to seek help, this could put you at greater risk. We encourage you to protect yourself by keeping your efforts to get help hidden:

—Consider creating an anonymous email account that no one knows about or can access in order to communicate when reaching out for help.

—Try not to use devices that you don't control, including family computers and cell phones on a family plan. Using a secret, pre-paid phone, or accessing computers at school or the library is often a safer way to communicate.

We are here to help you find ways to protect your privacy and enable you to communicate safely and freely with people who can help you.

We're here to help you

Tahirih Justice Center: For legal support, social services, and safety planning, contact the Tahirih Justice Center Forced Marriage Initiative from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. EST, Monday-Friday.

Phone: 571-356-9491

Email: FMI@tahirih.org

Web: preventforcedmarriage.org

If you are overseas and need help:

- Contact the Department of State Office of Overseas Citizens Services. They can provide assistance to Americans in crisis overseas. Call **202-501-4444** between 8 a.m-8 p.m. EST; after-hours, call **202-647-4000** and request to speak with the OCS duty officer.
- Go to or contact the closest U.S. Embassy or Consulate for help (www.usembassy.gov).