



# Ask Arita



Preventing crime, protecting the public and helping those in need



## You'll never guess what they are making my girlfriend do!

**Dear Arita**

I've been in a secret relationship with my girlfriend for 6 months. We didn't tell her family as we knew they wouldn't approve. We were recently seen out holding hands together by a family friend who told her parents – and now they won't let her see me! She hasn't been to school in a week but she has texted me saying that her family are taking her away on holiday this summer to get married to a man she's never met. She doesn't want to go but is terrified of her parents. What should I do?

*Anonymous, Coventry*

### FM facts!

Arranged marriages are legal and involve two people who are happy to enter into a marriage set up by their families. Forced marriages are illegal and happen when one or two of the people who are going to get married, decide that they don't want to be in the marriage that has been set up for them. They might feel pressured or forced to do so. This pressure could be physical, psychological, sexual, financial or emotional.

**ARITA SAYS** Report your concerns immediately to the police who will find a way to speak to her quickly and assess her risk and her wishes. You must let the police know all her details, those of the man they have chosen for her to marry, and any address that you think she may be travelling to. The Police will also go through a safeguarding plan with you and check that you and your family are not in any danger as a result of your relationship. Forced marriage is a criminal offence and even if the marriage does take place abroad, it can still be dealt with as a criminal offence in the UK.

## My terrified best friend is in danger and I can't tell anyone!

**Dear Arita**

My best friend is being forced to marry someone she doesn't even know. She confided in me recently that this summer her parents and brother will be escorting her abroad to marry a man she doesn't know. She's told them that she doesn't want to but they said she has no choice. She is terrified of her family, particularly of her brothers who always seem to be watching her. I told her to go to the police and she said no as it would make things worse. She doesn't know what to do and I'm afraid time is running out. Should I tell someone at school? I'm worried that they may try and talk to her parents but then they will be angry as she wasn't supposed to tell anyone. Please help me urgently.

*Anonymous, 16, Birmingham*

**ARITA SAYS** Your friend is at real risk of a forced marriage and school holidays are a risky time for young people who can often be taken abroad to be married. It can sometimes be really difficult to rescue somebody from abroad and so the best form of safeguarding is to prevent them from going in the first place. It can often be the case that victims of forced marriage are watched over not just by their brothers, whom you describe here, but also extended family and members of the communities that they reside in. You must act quickly and let the police have all the information that you have while your friend is still in the country. You are also right in letting the school know who will work with the police to make your friend safe. There is often only one chance to save a victim and if we miss this opportunity, it can be too late.

### Charities of the week

If you're at risk of forced marriage or scared you might be, there are many places you can go to get help. This week we're highlighting:

#### Karma Nirvana

A UK registered charity that supports victims and survivors of forced marriage and honour based abuse.

**Web:** [www.karmanirvana.org.uk/](http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk/)  
**Tel:** 0800 5999247 (9am - 9pm Mon to Fri & 10am - 4pm Sat & Sun)

#### Forced Marriage Unit (FMU)

Not a charity, but an important body to highlight. Contact the FMU if you're trying to stop a forced marriage or you need help leaving a marriage you've been forced into.

**Web:** [www.gov.uk/stop-forced-marriage](http://www.gov.uk/stop-forced-marriage)  
**Tel:** 020 7008 0151, from overseas dial +44 (0)20 7008 0151 (9am - 5pm Mon to Fri. For out of hours calls, dial 020 7008 1500 and ask for the Global Response Centre)

### It's not culture...



...it's crime

For help call 101



## Arita's photo story

DAY 1



## MY FAMILY WILL DISOWN ME IF I DON'T GO BACK

**Dear Arita**

I came to the UK three years ago to study. I had to beg my parents to be able to come and they reluctantly agreed, as long as I promised to return home after the end of my studies and marry a girl they have chosen for me. I'm terrified as I've almost finished my degree now and I know I'll be expected to return home. I've settled into life over here and I'm very happy and don't want to be married. If I don't go back my family will be shamed and disown me. I'm so confused please help.

*Asim, Dudley*

**ARITA SAYS** Asim, your case is very complex as you are not a UK national. It may be possible for us to get a forced marriage protection order (FMPO) for you to help prevent forced marriages in other countries, however the FMPO could only be used if there are connections here in the UK (extended family or friends of parents). The order will only last as long as you have the right to remain here, so getting support in the form of an extended visa is key and you would need to apply for leave to remain in the UK. I strongly suggest that you speak to an immigration specialist solicitor ASAP and the police who will complete a risk assessment with you.

## Need Help?

If you are worried about forced marriage, please call West Midlands Police on 101 or 999 in an emergency.