



Ask Arita



Preventing crime, protecting the public and helping those in need



I'm scared it will happen to me too!

Dear Arita

My sister was married last year to a cousin of ours she had never met. She didn't want to marry him but my dad and brother said she would bring shame on the family if she didn't. I'm scared that they have the same planned for me, but I don't want to disappoint or embarrass them. What should I do?

Sonia, Dudley

ARITA SAYS Forced marriage became a criminal offence in June 2014 and therefore it is likely that if your sister was forced to marry against her will, that this law has been breached. Forced marriage rarely involves somebody being dragged kicking and screaming to the altar, it is more often than not an emotional pressure that is placed upon someone whose family make them feel that they have no choice whatsoever but to marry.

FM facts!

A forced marriage protection order is a civil order that protects the person who has been, or is being forced into marriage against their wishes. It contains legally binding conditions and directions to change the behaviour of the person or persons trying to force someone into marriage.

In your sister's case she believed that if she didn't marry, she would bring unbearable shame on the family. This pressure does not involve a physical act but this emotional pressure still amounts to a criminal offence. There can also be very serious implications in marrying cousins in that having a child with your first cousin raises the risk of a significant birth defects and genetic disorders. The police can help and support both you and your sister and stop this from happening. A forced marriage protection order can be obtained for you, which would not criminalise your parents but would act as a warning to them to not organise a marriage for you against your wishes and to not put you under any pressure to marry. Your parents could only be arrested if they went against anything that was written on the order.

Friend hasn't returned home

Dear Arita

My best friend Ani went on holiday over the summer with her parents but they returned home a couple of weeks ago without her. I've tried texting and calling Ani but the phone won't connect, so I went to her house to find out when she would be back. They told me she was not coming back as she'd got married over the summer and would be living abroad. I just don't understand - she never spoke about a boyfriend or fiancée before she left and we told each other everything. We were both so excited to be starting the same college course this September - it just doesn't make sense that she wouldn't come home. Can someone help me get in contact with her? I

just want to check she's okay.

Laura, 18, Coventry

ARITA SAYS It is possible that Ani has been forced into a marriage and you must tell the police immediately about your concerns, any travel details that you are aware of and all family details. The police will work with the National Forced Marriage Unit at the Foreign and Commonwealth office in London, to do their very best to get in touch with Ani and get her back to the UK if she has been forced into a marriage. Through a Forced Marriage Protection Order, Ani's parents can be ordered by a court to take Ani to their nearest Embassy so that she can be seen, looked after and brought home.

Need Help?

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

Charities of the week

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

Freedom Charity

A charity that works with young people via school programmes, social media and apps to empower and educate them around forced marriage and honour based abuse. Download the brilliant app from their website.

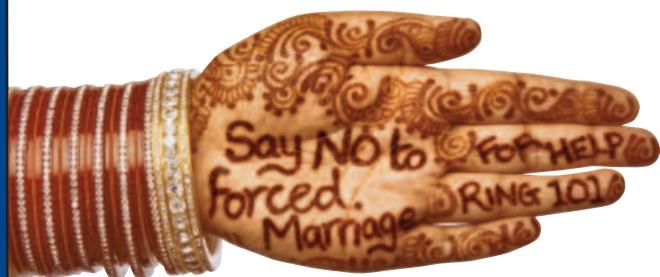
Web:
www.freedomcharity.org.uk
Tel: 0845 607 0133 or text 4freedom to 88802

Halo Project

A national charity that provides specialist support to victims of forced marriages and honour based abuse.

Web: www.haloproject.org.uk
Tel: 01642 683 045 (9am - 5pm Mon to Fri)

It's not culture...



...it's crime

For help call 101



Arita's photo story

DAY 2



SHE'S PERFECT - BUT NOT PERFECT FOR ME

Dear Arita

A couple of years ago, my family set up an engagement between me and a really nice girl, who is now my wife. As the wedding drew closer I realised that I didn't love her and that we shouldn't get married. When my family found out I planned to call off the engagement they were angry. My aunts and uncles told me I was selfish and uncaring and that I should do it for the sake of my parents, who have sacrificed a lot for me. In the end I gave in and married my wife a few weeks later. Two years in and I feel so trapped. My wife is lovely and does everything for me, but we don't have anything in common and I don't love her. I know she doesn't love me either but I feel there is nothing we can do about it.

Ash

ARITA SAYS Ash, it sounds as if your relationship with your wife started off as an arranged marriage where you were both happy and consenting to the marriage plans. However, as soon as you realised that you didn't love your fiancé and

tried to call off the engagement, this became a forced marriage. Forced marriage often involves a great deal of emotional duress and the love you have for your parents and family have been used against you to make sure that you marry. You obviously have a great deal of respect for your wife, but when you have nothing in common and there is no love between you, then life together can become isolated, desperate and unfulfilling. It may not feel like it, due to the emotional pressure that has been placed upon you by family, but you both have the free will to leave the marriage and divorce. Please contact the police who will give you all your choices which can include a criminal prosecution, a forced marriage protection order and a safety plan. They will make sure that you are supported and will put you in touch with other organisations such as Karma Nirvana, who have volunteers on their helpline who have been in your position and have come out the other side.