

# These are the kids being forced to wed



A WA teenager bravely fled her family home and went to a police station after her parents tried forcing her to marry an older man from the Middle East who would have been able to apply to live in Australia should the marriage have gone ahead.

The shocking incident was one of 16 forced marriage cases investigated by the Australian Federal Police in WA in the past three years.

In another recent case in WA, The West Australian has been told about a woman who was the victim of a forced marriage and dumped back in her country of origin against her will with her children after the husband decided he no longer wanted to financially support them.

Domestic violence advocates believe the cases of forced marriage reported to the AFP are just the “tip of the iceberg” because of how difficult it is for victims in these situations to seek help and the lack of awareness in the wider community about forced marriage.

A WA Forced Marriage Network has now been formed to identify victims so they can be provided with support and to give training to people including frontline workers such as GPs and teachers so they can identify the signs of forced marriage.

The network includes the AFP, the Department of Communities, the Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans, and the WA Women’s Council.

In the 2019-2020 financial year, there were five suspected forced marriage cases reported to the AFP in which the victim lived in WA. The year before, there were eight cases. In total last year, there were 23 human trafficking cases last year in which the victim lived in WA.

AFP Det-Sgt Ross Hinscliff, pictured, who leads the Perth team investigating human trafficking, confirmed that last year they helped an 18-year-old whose parents were planning to marry her against her wishes to a man living overseas.

The woman had bravely fled her family home and presented herself to a WA police station.

The marriage was stopped from going ahead and she was provided with support through the Government’s Support for Trafficked Peoples Program, run by the Red Cross.

The West has chosen not to identify her family’s country of origin to protect her identity.

## PEOPLE WHO ARE IN OR AT RISK OF FORCED MARRIAGE MAY

- Have a family history of elder siblings leaving education or marrying early
- Express concern regarding an upcoming family holiday
- Exhibit signs of depression, self-harm, attempted suicide, social isolation or substance abuse
- Have unreasonable restrictions from the family and excessive parental restriction e.g. not being allowed out or always being accompanied
- Make a sudden announcement they are engaged
- Show evidence of family disputes/conflict, domestic violence/abuse, running away from home or isolation from the community
- Have a history of female genital mutilation/circumcision
- Dowry abuse

SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE

“One of the many challenges police have in cases of forced marriage is that much of the offending is perpetrated by members of the victim’s family or by other people known to them,” Det-Sgt Hinscliff said.

“This puts victims in a very difficult position and many want to be safe but do not want to see a relative prosecuted.

“A prosecution in this case did not occur, the primary consideration being the wishes of the victim.

“This does not diminish the woman’s courage and bravery in speaking up and seeking help.

“The AFP, in collaboration

with its partners, has continued to monitor the welfare of the young woman, who has been able to establish an independent life in WA.”

Det-Supt Paula Hudson, of the AFP Human Trafficking Command, said cases could involve “coercion and/or deception by family members”.

Motivations could include the aim of obtaining visas for other family members.

“But there are also other cultural situations at play including dowries,” she said.

She said they had seen a “concerning growing trend in the number of human trafficking allegations reported to the AFP

across Australia in recent years” including forced marriage. She said “anyone can come across indicators of human trafficking”, so it was important to raise awareness of this type of crime, not only among police and first responders but in the community.

“The AFP can assist victims and offer protection,” Det-Supt Hudson said. “We can intervene and assist victims through the use of border alerts, preventing people leaving Australia against their will, along with intervention with family and court orders,” she said.

Dr Carol Kaplanian, Women’s Health co-ordinator at

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Picture: Danella Bevis

King Edward Memorial Hospital and a member of the WA Forced Marriage Network, said the cases reported to the AFP were a "gross underestimate of the prevalence" of forced marriage. She said it was important to understand a forced marriage was different from an arranged marriage because in an arranged marriage the parties had given their consent.

Forced marriage was a form of violence which could be linked with other kinds of abuse including female genital mutilation, and victims could also be subject to sexual abuse and marital rape, she said.

"Not every forced marriage ends in abuse ... but the dynamics around how the marriage takes place increases the likelihood of abuse and one of the biggest forms of abuse is sexual abuse," Dr Kaplanian said.

"That is something I have come across in my work quite significantly."

In one case Dr Kaplanian was aware of in WA, a woman who had been the victim of a forced marriage was dumped against her will in her country of origin with her children after her husband decided he no longer wanted to support them. It is understood she was able to return to WA after bravely getting in touch with the embassy.

Dr Kaplanian said forced marriage was tied closely to the issue of women on temporary visas becoming abuse victims.

They were particularly vulnerable as they often feared being deported if they sought help, may speak little or no English, and did not have access to support like Centrelink.

Kathy Fagan, ACRATH regional co-ordinator for Western Australia, said the WA forced marriage network was aiming to train as many front-line workers and members of the public as possible on the issue so victims could be identified and offered support.

"The WA Forced Marriage network has been formed to educate and train workers on forced marriage, so if a person comes in they know what to look for," she said.

"After we had our inaugural network meeting, about two weeks later a young person actually went to emergency looking for help and the emergency worker had been at the launch so was able to recognise it was a case of forced marriage.

"That's how important it is that people get the online training ACRATH have developed."

Visit [acrath.org.au](http://acrath.org.au)  
Red Cross Support for Trafficked People Program 03 9345 1800  
Women's domestic violence hotline 1800 007 339

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with its partners, has continued to monitor the welfare of the young woman, who has been able to establish an independent life in WA." Det-Supt Paula Hudson, of the AFP Human Trafficking Command, said cases could involve "coercion and/or deception by family members". Motivations could include the aim of obtaining visas for other family members. "But there are also other cultural situations at play including dowries," she said. She said they had seen a "concerning growing trend in the number of human trafficking allegations reported to the AFP

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