



Response to:
National Commission on Forced Marriage
Call for Evidence Session
16th June 2015

**Hosted by Equality and Human Rights Commission in
Wales**

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About the NSPCC

We're leading the fight against child abuse in the UK and Channel Islands. We help children who've been abused to rebuild their lives, we protect children at risk, and we find the best ways of preventing child abuse from ever happening.

Abuse ruins childhood, but it can be prevented. That's why we're here. That's what drives all our work, and that's why – as long as there's abuse – we will fight for every childhood.

We help children rebuild their lives, and we find ways to prevent abuse from ruining any more. So when a child needs **a helping hand, we'll be there. When parents are finding it tough, we'll help. When laws need to change, or governments need to do more, we won't give up until things improve.** Abuse changes childhood. But so can we.

What are young people telling us?

- The NSPCC is concerned that children as young as twelve are seeking help from ChildLine after becoming worried they will be forced to marry against their will. Choosing a life partner is a basic human right and no religion or culture condones forced marriage. Yet despite this many children and young people are being coerced or even forced to do so without their consent.
- Latest figures from the 24-hour, free service show the number of contacts – online and phone - about the issue has shot up by two-thirds in the last year, to 141, with some of the victims saying they are suicidal. Others have been threatened by their families and in one in ten cases there has been violence.
 - In 2013/14 ChildLine received 141 contacts about forced marriage – this represents a 70 per cent increase on 2012/13.
 - Since ChildLine started recording calls about forced marriage in 2011, contacts have increased by 156 per cent.
 - Just over a quarter of those who contacted ChildLine were aged 12-15, others were 16-18. The majority – 108- were girls

ChildLine Animation

- To help children and young people understand the change in the law and illustrate how it might affect them, ChildLine has produced a short **animation in conjunction with the UK Government's Forced Marriage Unit** <https://www.childline.org.uk/Videos/Pages/Forced-marriage.aspx> .
- The film is targeted at South Asian girls aged 13-17 years and is designed to show what the change in the law means and how it could affect them.
- The film portrays the story of a young girl, Layla, and follows her from childhood into her teenage years, as seen by her travelling on a conveyor belt. Although the belt does at one point spiral out of control, the film ultimately highlights how Layla can take back control of her life and that forced marriage is not the only option. We want to show young people that they are in control of their own lives and that support is available for them.

What is the NSPCC's Position?

- Under the umbrella of the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Bill, forced marriage will become a crime on 16 June 2014. The NSPCC supports the criminalisation of forced marriage. Forced marriage ruins young lives in the UK and too many cases go unreported to police. We hope that the change in the law will prove to be a powerful deterrent

and send out a strong message that coercing people to marry is wrong.

- **Forced marriage is a very complex and sensitive subject and people's** reactions are not always straightforward. It is always a risk that some children may not speak up but anyone concerned should be aware that prosecution is not the only course of action. The new law will help get a child in danger to safety – which may mean working with the family to help them better understand the situation and the implications of their actions.
- Of course, if a family refuses to work with social services then prosecution has to be an option. It may not be what the child wants but authorities will ensure **that the course of action is in the child's** best interests.
- Forced marriage is often hidden and 'underground'. **We hope that this** change in law will give children and young people who are concerned the confidence to come forward.
- The NSPCC hosts the Child Trafficking Advice which provides advice to professionals about child trafficking issues, including forced marriage.



**Child Trafficking Advice
Centre**

If you work with children or young people who may have been trafficked into the UK, contact our specialist service for information and advice.

Call us or email help@nspcc.org.uk for more information.

0808 800 5000

Contact CTAC