

Role: Harmful practices support worker
Agency: Stop Domestic Abuse

Honour based abuse



This case study relates to a female called Armelle* in her early twenties. She was referred to Stop Domestic Abuse by Children's Services due to their concerns of so-called honour based abuse and the risk of forced marriage.

Armelle's mother had passed away when she was a child and she had grown up with her father and stepmother. Armelle disclosed that she had been emotionally and physically abused by her stepmother from an early age, as well as

being subjected to so called honour based abuse. This abuse had been reported to police while she was still a child and Children's Services had been made aware by the police and become involved with the family.

Armelle stated that once she reached the age of 20 her father told her: "I have raised you for 20 years, you owe me obedience." He told her she was to marry her cousin who lived in his country of origin. Armelle stated that her father had never used any physical abuse, but she believed that she was indebted to him and that to refuse his request would disappoint him. Therefore, she reluctantly went ahead with the marriage. She left the UK to marry her cousin and returned while her husband remained in his country of origin to apply for a spousal visa.

At the point of referral, Armelle was pregnant with her first child. While she was engaged with Stop Domestic Abuse it was discovered that there was an error in the husband's date of birth on the marriage certificate which invalidated the certificate. Armelle was required by her family to return to her husband's country to rectify this. Armelle did not want to be in the marriage and spoke out about this. She was made aware that she had the option to seek a Forced Marriage Protection Order and she initially wanted to pursue this option. However, when the process was explained, and she became aware that the application would have to be served on her father she felt unable to proceed. She had entered the marriage to save her father's feelings and to not disappoint him, so she felt unable to engage in a legal process that her father had to be aware of. This was discussed with Armelle and, though encouragement was given, she still felt unable to proceed. The Harmful Practices support worker had a lengthy conversation with the Forced Marriage Unit to express Armelle's concerns and barriers to reporting the forced marriage. The Forced Marriage Unit shared

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their concerns about Armelle's situation but were unable to intervene as the process required serving the notice to the parent and there were no other options available to secure a legal order to prevent the forced marriage.

In view of the barrier to Armelle pursuing her legal options, the Harmful Practices worker supported Armelle with safety planning so that she could be safe at home and know what to do if she was coerced into travelling to her husband's country. The Harmful Practices worker also liaised with the police for additional safeguarding and to flag the issue. The police provided safety items such as another mobile phone, personal alarms, and further safety advice to Armelle.

The Harmful Practices worker continues to provide one to one support to Armelle, who has stated that she remains unsure about what to do about her future. The Harmful Practices worker is empowering Armelle to make informed decisions and to acknowledge the abuse, so that she can make the best decision for her life and her baby's future.

Armelle has felt unable to pursue her options but by working with her and other agencies the Harmful Practices worker has been able to keep Armelle safe from risk, ensure that relevant agencies are aware of those risks, and empower Armelle to recognise that the practice of forced marriage is illegal in the UK. Despite being unsure as to how to proceed and feeling unable to pursue legal options, Armelle has an increased understanding of her rights and the responsibilities of services. She has grown in confidence in knowing how to seek support or help and to whom to turn. She has felt confident enough in the support she has received to remain engaged with services, despite feeling that her options are blocked.

**Pseudonym*