

## Teen 'slave' bride calls for end to marriage under 18

Hazel Shearing

An Afghan girl forced to marry a British man when she was 14 has urged the government to protect other children by making marriage illegal in the UK for under-18s.

At present, any child aged 16 or 17 in England and Wales can get married as long as they have permission from both parents. In Scotland they do not need even that.

Fatima, now 17, who did not want to reveal her surname, was 13 when she came home from school in Afghanistan to discover she was engaged to a relative in London. "I said, 'No, Mum, I'm studying.' I was in year 9," she said. "I was thinking about my classmates – if they knew, I would feel really ashamed. I was crying."

She met the man only days before they married in Afghanistan, and was terrified when she was expected to have sex with

him. They lived for two years apart – he was in London and she was in Afghanistan – before she travelled to Britain last December on a spousal visa that claimed she was 23, even though she was only 16.

Life in London was far from what she had been promised. She was regularly beaten and made to cook and clean for his large family, who made it clear if they didn't like her meals.

"They were throwing the food in the bin in front of me... I did not eat for two days," she said. "I was like a slave. They were just using me."

Her husband told her she would be deported if she called the police. "I said, 'OK, if the police send me to Afghanistan, then it's fine – my father will kill me; it's nothing. Dying is better than this life,'" Fatima said.

Since summoning the courage to call the police, she has been in the care of social services. Her family in

RAY WELLS



Fatima says she had to cook and clean for her husband's family. 'I was like a slave. They were just using me'

Afghanistan have shunned her, but she hopes for a new start when she begins college next week.

"The UK should change the law, because marrying before 18 takes lots of opportunities from your life," she said.

Between 2010 and 2014, 1,165 girls under the age of 18 were married in England and Wales, according to the Office for National Statistics.

Brigitte Clark, a senior

lecturer at Oxford Brookes University who has written about forced marriage, said: "A whole lot of children just disappear off the radar, go abroad and are married. It's a very difficult thing to police."

The charity Girls Not Brides UK is campaigning to change the law that allows marriage at 16 with parental consent. In practice, it often amounts to parental "coercion", it says.

Diana Nammi, executive director of the Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation, which works with the charity, said: "The law must be clear that no child marriage should be recognised, full stop."

Aneeta Prem, president of Freedom, which raises awareness of forced marriage in schools, said: "There are many young people who want to get married at 16 that

are completely in love... but protecting young girls is more important." Virendra Sharma, Labour MP for Ealing, whose mother was married at 16 in India, supports a change in the law.

"Child marriage is actually killing the child rather than helping the child at that tender age – 15, 16, 17 – when the child is not a woman. She's still a baby," he said. @hazelshearing

## Worst by miles: UK's least-value rail trips

Some travellers are paying more than five times the price for journeys of similar length

Andrew Gilligan, Louis Goddard and Sam Joiner

The Oxfordshire town of Didcot, with its steam railway centre and starter housing estates, is one of the fastest growing in Britain.

But according to new analysis by The Sunday Times, Didcot has another distinction: one of the worst-value train services in the country.

A month of punctuality records on hundreds of key lines was set against the prices charged, to gauge the value offered to travellers.

The exercise, using peak fares, found huge variations in rates for trips of similar length. Per mile, some rail users paid more than five times as much as others.

The most expensive journey was from Ipswich to London, at 71p a mile. A third of trains from the Suffolk town arrived late. But the worst value was suffered by travellers from London to Didcot, who paid Great Western 59p a mile and were delayed more than 60% of the time.

The 20-mile trip from London Bridge to Sevenoaks, another poor-value town, cost 61p a mile – and was delayed or cancelled 36% of the time.

A journey of the same length from Grays, Essex, to London Fenchurch Street cost 30p a mile – less than half – and was delayed or cancelled only 15% of the time, making it one of the best-value trips in southeast England.

In the north of England and Scotland, travel was nearly always cheaper than around London and usually more punctual. The 43-mile trip from Largs, on the Firth of Clyde, to Glasgow, at 19p a mile, was late 22% of the time.

The analysis counted only price and punctuality. Trains outside London are often older, slower and less frequent, helping to account for the lower prices.

Cat Hobbs of We Own It, a group that campaigns for the railways to return to public ownership, said: "Passengers are putting up with a wildly

unfair postcode lottery on top of ever-rising rail fares. We need to scrap the mishmash of private operators and replace it with an integrated system."

The exercise used four weeks' punctuality data, ending on Thursday, August 24, for 360 journeys into and out of London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Glasgow.

Only 47% of rail users – and 33% of commuters – see their service as value for money, according to the latest national rail passenger survey, carried out by the watchdog Transport Focus.

Just 24% of commuters on Greater Anglia, the route serving Ipswich, were satisfied with value for money, the joint lowest in the country.

Northern, ScotRail and Merseyrail had commuter scores of 36%, 50% and 52% for value.

Bruce Williamson, spokesman for the campaign group Railfuture, said: "In the past, governments have justified increases in fares by saying they are improving services, but there doesn't seem to be that correlation. Those paying high prices for poor service will feel they are getting a bum deal."

@mragilligan

### THE FIVE WORST ROUTES

Route	Price per mile	Delayed or cancelled
Ipswich to Liverpool St	71p	33.1%
Tunbridge Wells to Cannon St	64p	29%
London Bridge to Sevenoaks	61p	36.1%
Paddington to Didcot Parkway	59p	60.2%
Liverpool Street to Witham	58p	38.8%

Anytime walk-up fares valid for any operator were used on selected routes. Some destinations have cheaper anytime fares only valid on certain operators. Oyster fares at the peak rate were used where available and cheaper than a paper ticket. Distances were calculated by the shortest route and rounded to the mile. Punctuality was measured for the four weeks ending August 24

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## NHS spying on negligence 'victims' hits record level

Jon Ungoe-Thomas

The NHS is mounting more than 50 surveillance operations a year on alleged victims of medical negligence or accidents in its hospitals.

NHS Resolution, which deals with clinical negligence claims in hospitals, says it is launching an offensive against exaggerated claims and fraud. The operations include the use of private detectives to follow patients who sue for compensation.

A record high of 55 surveillance operations were authorised in 2016-17, up from 24 in 2013-14.

In one case a 42-year-old patient claimed more than £2.5m in damages after alleged negligent surgery. The woman was put under surveillance and it was noted she could undertake most daily activities. She was awarded £115,000 and the judge found her case had been "in part dishonest and in part grossly exaggerated".

In about half of the cases – 23 in 2016-17 – evidence of exaggeration was detected. It means in some cases victims of NHS blunders who are not exaggerating their claims are being put under surveillance.

Peter Walsh, chief executive of Action Against Medical Accidents, said: "This is outrageous. This is an

invasion of the privacy of patients who have already suffered untold misery through negligent treatment."

The surveillance is described as "non-obtrusive" – which can include private investigators filming patients or researching social media.

The investigations extend to NHS staff who sue. Lorna Hayden, a former cardiac physiologist at Kent and Sussex Hospital in Tunbridge Wells, was awarded £425,000 in a High Court judgment in December over an injury she sustained moving a 16-stone patient in March 2007.

It emerged during the case that she had been filmed by investigators.

Jacqueline Hardaway, a lawyer at Dawson Hart, said: "The NHS trust seriously injured one of their hard-working employees, through negligence, then subjected her to years of heartache, filming her and calling her a fraud, until, after a nine-year battle, a High Court judge awarded her substantial compensation... clearing her of any dishonesty."

NHS Resolution said it always considered privacy before proceeding. "While it is very rarely used, surveillance helps to protect the public purse from paying unreasonable or unjustified levels of compensation."



Fuel consumption in MPG (l/100km) for i30 Tourer range: Urban 42.2 (6.7) – 67.3 (4.2), Extra Urban 56.5 (5.0) – 78.5 (3.6), Combined 51.4 (5.5) – 74.3 (3.8), CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions 129 – 99 g/km. These official EU test figures are to be used as a guide for comparative purposes and may not reflect all driving results. T&Cs apply. Subject to availability at participating dealers on vehicle orders received between 1st July and 30th September 2017. Figures based on a non-maintenance contract hire package with initial rental of £1,074 followed by 47 monthly rentals of £179. 8,000 contract miles per year. Car shown with initial rental of £1,864 followed by 47 monthly rentals of £311. Excess mileage of 9 pence per mile if you go over the contracted mileage. Fair wear and tear charges may apply. You will not own the vehicle. Subject to status. Guarantee may be required. 18s and over. Hyundai Finance Contract Hire RH2 9AQ. Hyundai 5 Year Warranty subject to terms and conditions. See [hyundai.co.uk](http://hyundai.co.uk) or consult a Hyundai dealership.