

# WHAT IS CONVERSION 'THERAPY'?

Conversion 'therapy' refers to any interventions that seek to change, 'cure' or suppress the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of a person.

Conversion 'therapy' is not 'therapy' but a harmful practice and form of abuse against LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and all other identities included under the LGBT+ umbrella, including but not limited to intersex, asexual, pansexual, nonbinary, queer and questioning) people.

It is considered harmful and unethical by many major health and mental health organisations, including the World Health Organisation (WHO), and is widely discredited.

## Why are these practices discredited?

Healthy, appropriate and affirming therapy or counselling is two-way and supports a person to explore their sexual orientation or gender identity, regardless of the outcome.

Conversion 'therapy' is one-way and aims to get a person to change their sexual orientation or gender identity.

## How are conversion 'therapy' and 'honour'-based abuse linked?

Anyone who is LGBT+ or exploring/questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity can be at risk of conversion 'therapy', regardless of age, culture, background or ethnicity. However, there is a greater risk in communities where being LGBT+ is not accepted or considered to be against religious or cultural 'norms'.

Conversion 'therapy' may be used by family and community members as a form of control or punishment if someone is perceived to have violated cultural or religious norms related to sexuality or gender identity.

This is a form of 'honour'-based abuse, as it is intended to protect the perceived 'honour' or reputation of the family or community and punish the person who is believed to have brought 'shame' upon them.

As with other harmful practices, perpetrators may be loving and supportive in other areas of your life, and wrongly believe that they are doing the right thing and/or that they are helping in some way. Despite this, it is still abuse.

## What does conversion 'therapy' look like?

Conversion 'therapy' can take many forms, including but not limited to:

- **Talking therapy** - traditional psychotherapy or counselling that seeks through conversation to convince a person that their sexual orientation or gender identity is wrong
- **Religious or spiritual interventions** - the belief that prayer or religious practices can change a person's sexual orientation, sometimes referred to as 'praying the gay away'
- **Corrective rape** - a crime where an individual is forced to have sex against their will - often under threat of violence - with the intention of making them conform to heterosexuality or normative gender identity
- **Chemical castration** - using hormone treatments, medication, or even removal of testicles, to artificially prevent sexual desire in those assigned male at birth
- **Behavioural interventions** - including techniques such as aversion therapy, where negative stimuli are associated with same-sex attractions, or positive reinforcement for opposite-sex attractions
- **Psychiatric interventions** - the dangerous use of medications or treatments to suppress or alter an individual's sexual orientation, which are not based on any scientific evidence
- **Group therapy** - group sessions where individuals are forced to conform to heteronormative or gender normative behaviours
- **Exorcisms or deliverance ministry** - the performance of religious/spiritual rituals or ceremonies with the belief that they can expel perceived 'homosexual spirits' or influences
- **Hypnosis** - using this technique to attempt to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity
- **Verbal or physical abuse** - to control a person's thoughts or behaviour by using violence, shame, guilt, or fear
- **Other forms of threat or pressure** - for example threatening a person with homelessness if they do not conform to heterosexuality or normative gender identity

## Impact of conversion 'therapy'

Conversion 'therapy' can cause:

- Psychological distress
- Anxiety, depression and other mental health issues
- Suicidal thoughts and ideation
- Self-harm
- Social Isolation
- Low self-esteem and confidence
- Long-term psychological harm (e.g. anxiety disorders and PTSD)
- Difficulty forming relationships

## Prevalence of conversion 'therapy'

According to figures from the UK Government's 2017 National LGBT Survey, in the UK:

**7%** of LGBT+ people

**10%** of Asexual people

**13%** of Trans people

Have been offered or been subjected to conversion 'therapy'.

Surveying those who had been subjected to conversion 'therapy', a 2018 National LGBT Survey found that:

**19%** conducted in healthcare and medical settings

**16%** conducted by a parent, guardian or family member

**9%** conducted by a member of their community

**51%** conducted by a faith organisation or group

## Conversion 'therapy' & the law

Globally, 16 countries have some form of full or partial national ban on conversion 'therapy', including Brazil, Germany, Ecuador, Canada and Taiwan. Some other countries have proposed bans or are consulting on the issue.

## Conversion 'therapy' is not currently banned in the UK.

In 2018 the UK government committed to banning these practices with then-Prime Minister, Theresa May, describing it as an 'abhorrent' practice. However, the ban has been met with significant delays and attempts to 'water down' its content.

A statement in the Queen's Speech in 2022 highlighted the government intended to ban only "conversion therapy practices intended to change sexual orientation", and only to a limited extent, as adults would still be able to 'consent' to the practice. This would exclude Trans and non-binary people from the protection of the ban and would put adults at risk of being pressured or forced into 'consenting' to harmful conversion practices.

Many health, mental health and LGBT+ organisations, as well as organisations like Savera UK, who work to help the LGBT+ community, are backing calls for a complete legislative ban that makes conversion therapy illegal:

- **Wherever it occurs** – in public or private, through healthcare or religious and cultural interventions
- **Whoever is targeted** – whether a child or an adult, whether they are coerced or have been pressured into "consenting"
- **From the moment it's spotted** – through advertising on and offline

For more information visit about the progress of this campaign, visit: [www.banconversiontherapy.com](http://www.banconversiontherapy.com)

## Responding to conversion 'therapy'

If someone is at risk or under threat of conversion 'therapy', or they have been subjected to the practice and you suspect it to be a form of 'honour'-based abuse but are unsure what to do; or if the person is in immediate danger or at risk of harm, contact the police on 999.

## UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES

- Let the family, community or social network know about the disclosure
- Speak to the person at risk in front of family members or within the family home
- Approach the family or community leaders or attempt mediation
- Use members of the community to interpret
- Accidentally give out information which might jeopardise the person's safety

Caution is required about how information is shared, recorded, and safeguarded within the organisation. Information should only be shared on a need-to-know basis.

## We will end 'honour'-based abuse and harmful practices

Helpline: **0800 107 0726**

10am - 4pm, Monday to Friday



To make a professional referral to Savera UK, complete our online form:  
[saverauk.co.uk/get-help/referrals-for-professionals/](https://saverauk.co.uk/get-help/referrals-for-professionals/)

If you are an individual who needs help or advice, complete this form:  
[saverauk.co.uk/savera-uk-individual-referral-form/](https://saverauk.co.uk/savera-uk-individual-referral-form/)

**In an emergency, please call 999.**