

Factsheet for Partner Agencies in Safeguarding Children

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

What is Female Genital Mutilation?

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is sometimes known as ‘female genital cutting or female circumcision’. It involves procedures that include the partial or total removal of the external female genital organs for non-medical reasons. Unlike the majority of male circumcision, it is extremely painful and has serious health consequences, both at the time when the mutilation is carried out and in later life.

Though some may characterise FGM as inspired by religion, no holy books from major religions, such as The Bible, Qur’an, or the Torah advocate it.

Campaigners say FGM is promoted by beliefs about the “lack of cleanliness” of female genitalia and about control of women’s lives. It is seen by some as an “initiation ceremony” and a route to adulthood for young girls and women.

Types of FGM

The World Health Organisation identifies four levels of severity, ranging from Type 1 to Type 4. Definitions are identified below:

Type 1: Clitoridectomy (circumcision) -

- Cutting of the hood of the clitoris

Type 2: Excision

- Cutting of the clitoris and /or part of the labia minora

Type 3: Infibulations

- Total removal of the clitoris, labia minora and the scraping of the inner tissue of the labia majora - the loose skin is then pinned together leaving a small hole to allow the passage of bodily fluids

Type 4:

- All other procedures including stretching, pricking and piercing

The immediate effects of FGM include:

- Severe pain
- Shock
- Bleeding
- Infections including tetanus, HIV and hepatitis B and C
- Inability to urinate

- Damage to nearby organs including the bowel and even death

Long-term consequences include:

- Chronic vaginal and pelvic infections
- Menstrual problems
- Persistent urine infections
- Kidney damage and possible failure
- Cysts and abscesses
- Pain during sex
- Infertility
- Complications during pregnancy and childbirth.

There are also traditional and local terms for FGM, which can be found at <http://www.bardag-lscb.co.uk/Documents/Traditional%20and%20local%20terms%20for%20FGM.PDF>

Who is at risk of FGM?

FGM is typically performed on girls between the ages of 4 and 15 years, though newborn infants and young women entering marriage, or child bearing age have been victims.

Girls and women in the UK who have undergone FGM may be British citizens, born to parents from FGM practicing communities, or they may be women living in Britain who are originally from those communities.

An estimated 138 million females are at risk worldwide – 24,000 in the UK. Victims are taken abroad, commonly on flights in holiday periods, particularly in the summer, but not exclusively. Some victims come to the attention of Police and other agencies when they seek medical help for the physical effects of FGM.

It is imperative to identify individuals at risk, such as girls talking about going abroad with a relative for s “special procedure”.

Where does the practice of FGM originate?

FGM is practiced in more than 28 countries in Africa and in some countries in Asia and the Middle East.

African countries with the highest likelihood of FGM being practised are:

- Burkina
- Djibouti,
- Egypt,
- Eritrea,
- Ethiopia,
- Faso,
- Gambia,
- Guinea,
- Kenya,
- Mali,
- Sierra Leone,
- Somalia,

- Sudan,
- Yemen

There are many more communities living in Barking and Dagenham. Girls from these migrant communities may be at risk of FGM.

FGM, the Law and Law enforcement

FGM is illegal in the UK under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003. The new Act also makes it an offence for UK nationals and those with permanent UK residence to be taken overseas for the purpose of female circumcision, to aid and abet, counsel, or procure the carrying out of Female Genital Mutilation. The maximum jail sentence is 14 years.

From June 2009 – 2011, a total of 75 incidents in London included FGM concerns. Two cases within 2009 were investigated, with arrests, but no charges.

If you know, or believe that someone is at *immediate risk of FGM* you should call the Police on 999 and contact the MASH team on 0208 227 3811 to complete a Multi Agency Referral Form (MARF)

The expert view

The Foundation for Women’s Health says FGM is “...traditionally carried out by older women with no medical training. Anaesthetics and antiseptic treatment are not generally used and the practice is usually carried out using basic tools such as knives, scissors, scalpels, pieces of glass and razor blades”.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) says “It involved removing and damaging healthy and normal female genital tissue, and hence interferes with the natural function of girls’ and women’s bodies. (It) causes severe pain and several immediate and long term health consequences, including difficulties in childbirth causing dangers to the child”.

Girls and women who have been subjected to FGM also suffer serious psychological damage. Research carried out in practising African communities found that women, who had undergone FGM, suffered the same levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as adults who had experienced early childhood abuse. 80% of the women in the study suffered from mood and/or anxiety disorders (*Behrendt et al, 2005; HM Government, 2011*).

Waris Dirie, Human rights activist, supermodel “Bond Girl” and best selling author, underwent FGM at the age of 5 years old. She says “FGM has no cultural, no traditional and no religious aspect. It is a crime which seeks justice”.

Useful contacts

Barking and Dagenham Somali Women’s Association:

They have been working with the local authority in regards to developing an FGM strategy and have been supporting the community by running workshops and information sessions for families living in Barking and Dagenham. Our services are confidential and we will support people affected by FGM in a sensitive and culturally appropriate manner. The centre has 8 community languages available to engage the community and has a women-only friendly atmosphere.

Contact: Zahra Ibrahim: Excel Women's Centre 13 London Road, Barking IG11 8AA,
Tel: 020 8594 3730

AFRUCA

They work with practitioners working with children and in the African community to raise awareness and educate everyone about issues affecting the welfare of children.

Contact: AFRUCA, Unit 3D/F Leroy House, 436 Essex Road, London, N1 3QP

Tel: 0207 704 2261

<http://www.afruca.org>

Forward UK (Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development)

They are an African Diaspora women led UK-registered campaign and support charity dedicated to advancing and safeguarding the sexual and reproductive health and rights of African girls and women

Contact: Forward UK, Suite 2.1 Chandelier Building, 2nd Floor, 8 Scrubs Lane, London NW10 6RB

Tel: 020 8960 4000

<http://www.forwarduk.org.uk/>

Freedom Charity

They aim to empower young people to feel they have the tools and confidence to support each other and have practical ways in which they can help their best friend around the issues of family relationships.

Contact: <http://www.freedomcharity.org.uk/what-we-do> or call 0845 607 0133

Desert Flower Foundation

This foundation was set up by Waris Dirie to support survivors and raise awareness of FGM with a view to eradication.

Contact: <http://www.desertflowerfoundation.org/en/>

Daughters of Eve

This is a non profit organisation that works to protect girls and young women who are at risk from female genital mutilation (FGM).

Contact: <http://www.dofeve.org>