

## What is Female Genital Mutilation?

The term FGM covers all harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes. There are 4 sub-types - all are illegal and have serious health risks. These range from pricking or cauterizing the genital area, through to partial or total removal of the external genitalia and narrowing the vaginal opening.

The cutting is made using things like a knife, pair of scissors, scalpel, glass or razor blades. It is usually performed by someone with no medical training and the girls are given no anesthetic, no antiseptic treatment and are often forcibly restrained.

There are an estimated 137,000 women and girls affected by FGM in England and Wales. It is usually carried out on girls between the ages of 5 and 14 years, but younger girls and adult women are sometimes victims of this procedure. It is extremely traumatic and can lead to serious, life-long physical and mental health problems.

It is also sometimes known as female cutting or circumcision and local communities tend to use local names for this procedure including Sunna; Khifad and Bondo.

It is estimated that 60,000 children in the UK have been born to mothers who have undergone this procedure.

The communities that are most at risk of FGM are from Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Egypt, and Nigeria. Non-African communities include The Yemen, Afghanistan, Kurdistan, Indonesia and Pakistan. It is not a religious requirement or obligation. Globally most muslims do not practice FGM and it is not condoned in the Christian or Jewish teachings either.

Northampton and Milton Keynes have been identified as being among the areas thought to have a higher concentration of at-risk girls and those who have undergone FGM than the rest of the UK.

**FGM is illegal:** It has been a criminal offence in the UK since 1985.

In 2003 the Female Genital Mutilation Act came into force and it also became a criminal offence for UK nationals or permanent UK residents to take their child abroad to have FGM. This has now been extended under the **Serious Crime Act 2015**, and it is an offence for any person (regardless of their nationality or residence status) to:

- perform FGM;
- Assist a girl to carry out FGM on herself;
- Assist a non-UK person to carry out FGM outside the UK on a UK national or permanent UK resident.

From July 2015 anyone can apply to the court for an FGM Protection Order if they are concerned that someone is at risk of this procedure. Breaching an FGM protection order is a criminal offence with a maximum sentence of 5 years imprisonment

On 31<sup>st</sup> October 2015 it became a Mandatory Duty to report cases of, or suspected case of, FGM going to be carried out or having been carried out.

Anyone found guilty of the offence faces a maximum penalty of 14 years in prison, a fine or both. Anyone found guilty of failing to protect a girl from the risk of FGM faces up to 7 years in prison, a fine or both.

NHS England recorded over 9,000 cases of FGM from April 2016 to March 2017. Almost half of these women lived in London, a third were women and girls born in Somalia but a third were UK-born nationals.

Despite this practice being illegal there have been no prosecutions in the UK.

Under the **FGM Act 2003** it is a mandatory duty for regulated professionals like healthcare workers, social care and teachers in England and Wales to make a report to the police. This applies where, in the course of their professional duties, they discover that FGM appears to have been carried out on a girl aged under 18 (at the time of the discovery).

### **What to look out for:**

A girl at immediate risk of FGM may not know what's going to happen. But she might talk about or you may become aware of:

- a long holiday abroad particular in the summer or going 'home' to visit family
- relative or cutter visiting from abroad
- a special occasion or ceremony to 'become a woman' or get ready for marriage
- a female relative being cut

Indicators that it might have already occurred include:

- prolonged absence from school
- change in behavior on return
- children finding it difficult to sit still
- complaining of pain between their legs or that someone has done something to them that they are not allowed to talk about
- academic work suffering

If you suspect or are worried about FGM follow the safeguarding policy or call the FGM helpline if you're worried a child is at risk of, or has had, FGM.

It's free, anonymous and open 24/7.

**[0800 028 3550](tel:08000283550)**