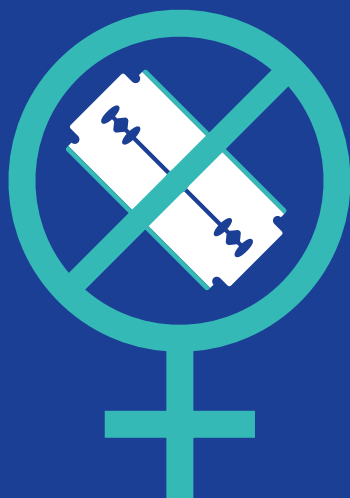


Practice guide



Responding to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Practice Guide

Responding to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

What is FGM?

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) includes all procedures involving the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or any other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It's also known as "**female circumcision**" or "**cutting**", and by other terms such as sunna, gudniin, halalays, tahur, megrez and khitan, among others.

The age at which FGM is carried out varies enormously according to the community. The procedure may be carried out shortly after birth, during childhood or adolescence, just before marriage or during a woman's first pregnancy.

Who is most at risk of FGM?

FGM is prevalent in 30 countries. These are concentrated in countries around the Atlantic coast to the Horn of Africa, in areas of the Middle East, and in some countries in Asia.

It is estimated that approximately 103,000 women aged 15-49 and approximately 24,000 women aged 50 and over who have migrated to England and Wales are living with the consequences of FGM.

In addition, approximately 10,000 girls aged 15 or under who have migrated to England and Wales are likely to have undergone FGM.

UK communities that are most at risk of FGM include Kenyan, Somali, Sudanese, Sierra Leonean, Egyptian, Nigerian and Eritrean. Non-African communities that practise FGM include Yemeni, Afghani, Kurdish, Indonesian and Pakistani.

What does the law say about FGM in the UK?

FGM is illegal in the **UK** (Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003) and is considered to be **child abuse**. If FGM is committed against a girl under the age of 16, each person who is

responsible for the girl at the time the FGM occurred could be guilty of the offence of failing to protect her from the risk of FGM.

It is also an offence for a UK national or UK resident (even in countries where FGM is not illegal) to: perform FGM abroad; assist a girl to perform FGM on herself outside the UK; and assist (from outside the UK) a non-UK person to carry out FGM outside the UK on a UK national or UK resident.

An offence of failing to protect a girl from risk of FGM can be committed wholly or partly outside the UK by a person who is a UK national or UK resident. The extra-territorial offences of FGM are intended to cover taking a girl abroad to be subjected to FGM.

Anyone who commits FGM could face up to 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.

Under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 and in Scotland, the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (Scotland) Act 2005; lifelong anonymity for victims of FGM is provided.

This means that no information may be published that could identify victims of FGM, even if there is

no eventual court case. The Act introduces FGM Protection Orders which are new civil orders to protect victims or potential victims of FGM. An order could include, for example, a requirement for a passport to be surrendered to prevent a girl being taken abroad for FGM.

The Act also provides a mandatory reporting duty for those in regulated health and social care professions and teachers in England and Wales to report 'known' cases of FGM in children and young people under 18 years of age to the police. The duty came into force on 31 October 2015

Why do some families subject their children or women to FGM?

Usually it is a girl's parents or her extended family that are responsible for arranging FGM. Some of the reasons given for the continued practice of FGM include;

- protecting family honour,
- preserving tradition,
- ensuring a woman's chastity,
- for cleanliness and
- as a preparation for marriage.

The World Health Organisation estimates that three million girls

undergo some form of the procedure every year in Africa alone.

Whilst FGM is often seen as an act of love, rather than cruelty, it causes significant harm and constitutes physical and emotional abuse. FGM is considered to be child abuse in the UK and is a violation of the child's right to life, their bodily integrity as well as of their right to health. It may also involve honour based violence or a forced marriage.

What are some of the consequences for a victim of FGM?

FGM can have serious consequences for a woman or girl health and in some instances can lead to death.

FGM in the short term can lead to infections, severe pain, bleeding and tetanus. Some of the long term consequences can mean that women suffer pain and discomfort during sex, chronic pain, cysts, abscesses, difficulties with periods and fertility problems. They might also suffer severe psychological trauma, including flashbacks and depression. They are also significantly more likely to experience difficulties during childbirth and their babies are more likely to die as a result of the practice. Serious complications during childbirth include the need to have

a caesarean section, dangerously heavy bleeding after the birth of the baby and prolonged hospitalisation following the birth

What are the signs and potential indicators for someone who has undergone or at risk of FGM?

Being aware of the signs and indicators of FGM and **understanding** your church or faith group's safeguarding policy and procedures is the first step to responding well to this type of abuse. Some of the signs to look out for include:

- knowing that the family belongs to a community in which FGM is practised and is making preparations for the child to take a holiday.
- arranging vaccinations or planning absence from school.
- the child may also talk about a special procedure/ceremony that is going to take place.
- indicators that FGM may already have occurred include prolonged absence from school, church or other activities with noticeable behaviour change on return.
- bladder or menstrual problems.
- children finding it difficult to sit still and look uncomfortable.

- complaining about pain between their legs.
- or talking about something somebody did to them that they are not allowed to talk about.

What should I do if I am concerned someone is at risk of FGM?

Respond with care. Talk to them about your concerns, but use simple language and straightforward questions;

- Be sensitive and let them know that they can talk to you again;
- Consult your church's safeguarding officer or and make a referral to children's social care and/or the police;
- If you are abroad and require help or advice you can call the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on +44 (0)20 7008 1500.

Consequently, confidentiality and information sharing are extremely important for anyone threatened with, or having already undergone FGM. It is important to discuss this with the safeguarding coordinator for your church or faith group.

Circumstances sometimes arise where a child, or more probably a young person, explicitly asks you not to give information to their parents/guardians or others with

some authority over them. Those who are 16 and above are assumed to have capacity to make decisions and their decisions should be respected. However, those under 16 may also have capacity and it is important to try, where possible, to respect the requests they make. Where a decision is made to share the information with another person, you should seek the consent of the person, before the disclosure. Most people will consent to the disclosure if they receive a careful explanation of why the disclosure is to be made and are assured about their safety (e.g. information will not be passed to their family) and what will happen following such a disclosure. Whether or not the person agrees to the disclosure, they should be told if there is to be a disclosure of confidential information. This will usually be to a professional.

In cases of FGM, involving the family and the community may increase the risk of significant harm to the child or young person. The family may deny that the child or young person is going to be subjected to FGM and they may expedite any travel arrangements and/or bring forward the procedure. It is therefore important that relatives, friends, community leaders and neighbours should not be used as interpreters or advocates – despite

any reassurances from this known person. If it is appropriate to use an advocate then an independent advocate should be sought.

Report your concerns if you remain concerned. Discuss these with your organisation's safeguarding coordinator and agree what action will be taken.

However, where immediate action is necessary to protect a child, young person or woman from FGM call 999 in an emergency.

A trained professional will give you free advice on what to do next.

They can also help:

- someone find a safe place to stay
- stop a UK visa if you've been forced to sponsor someone.

Useful resources

In addition to the resources available from the organisations listed below, CCPAS can offer advice on support for those affected by abuse. We have a 24 hour helpline – 0845 120 4550/01322 517817. We also have relevant material, articles from past editions of Caring and downloadable versions of other 'Help' leaflets which might be relevant. www.ccpas.co.uk

Useful contacts

NSPCC

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
FGM Helpline 0800 028 3550
fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk

Home Office FGM Unit

FGMEnquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Metropolitan Police Child Abuse Investigation Command/ Project Azure

020 7161 2888

FORWARD

Foundation for Women's Health
Research & Development
www.forwarduk.org.uk
020 8960 4000

Childline

www.childline.org.uk
0800 1111 (24 hr free helpline for children)

If you are abroad and require help or advice please call the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on

+44 (0) 20 7008 1500

If someone is at imminent risk of FGM, you should contact the police immediately on 999

This is one of a series of **Practice Guides** published by CCPAS. For our full range of resources and for more information visit our website **www.ccpas.co.uk**



CCPAS

PO Box 133, Swanley, Kent, BR8 7UQ.

Tel: 0303 003 11 11

Email: info@ccpas.co.uk Web: www.ccpas.co.uk

© CCPAS 2017

CCPAS Charity No: 1004490. Scottish Charity No: SCO40578. Company No: 2646487