

FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) Support Sheet 2019

SUMMARY

FGM also known as female circumcision or cutting, is a collective term for procedures which include the partial or total removal of the external female genital organs, or injury to the female genital organs, for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons.

FGM is medically unnecessary, is extremely painful, and has serious health consequences, both at the time of the procedure, and in later life. It can also be psychologically damaging.

A number of girls die as a direct result of the procedure, from blood loss or infection. In the longer term, women who have undergone some form of FGM are twice as likely to die in childbirth, and four times more likely to give birth to a still born child.

- The Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 (updated by Serious Crime Act 2015) makes it illegal to practice FGM in the UK;
- Illegal to assist a girl to mutilate her own genitalia;
- Illegal to take girls who are habitually resident in the UK abroad for FGM whether or not it is lawful in that country;
- Illegal to aid, abet, counsel or procure the carrying out of FGM abroad.

An offence under this act has a maximum penalty of up to 14 years in prison and/or a fine.



Reasons given for practising FGM:

- It brings status and respect to the girl.
- It preserves a girl's virginity/chastity.
- It is part of being a woman.
- It is a rite of passage.
- It gives a girl social acceptance, especially for marriage.
- It upholds the family honour.
- It cleanses and purifies the girl.
- It gives the girl and her family a sense of belonging to the community.
- It fulfils a religious requirement believed to exist.
- It perpetuates a custom/tradition.
- It helps girls and women to be clean and hygienic.
- It is aesthetically desirable.
- It is mistakenly believed to make childbirth safer for the infant.
- It rids the family of bad luck or evil spirits.

Signs/Indications to look for:

- It is believed that **FGM happens to British girls in the UK as well as overseas** (often in the family's country of origin). Girls of school age who are subjected to FGM overseas are thought to be taken abroad at the start of the school holidays, particularly in the summer holidays, in order for there to be sufficient time for her to recover before returning to her studies.

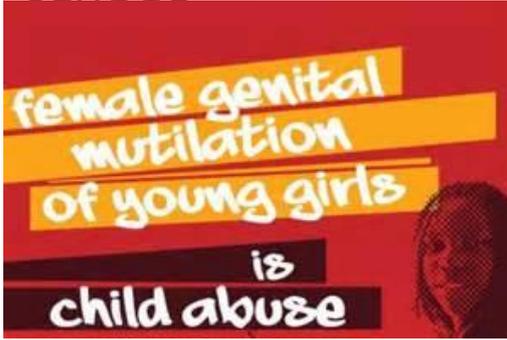
There can also be clearer signs when FGM is imminent:

- It may be possible that families will practise FGM in the UK when a female family elder is around, particularly when she is visiting from a country of origin.
- A professional may hear reference to FGM in conversation, for example a girl may tell other children about it.
- A girl may confide that she is to have a 'special procedure' or to attend a special occasion to 'become a woman'.
- A girl may request help from a teacher or another adult if she is aware or suspects that she is at immediate risk.
- Parents state that they or a relative will take the child out of the country for a prolonged period.
- A girl may talk about a long holiday to her country of origin or another country where the practice is prevalent.
- Parents seeking to withdraw their children from learning about FGM.

There are a number of indications that a girl or woman has already been subjected to FGM:

- A girl or woman may have difficulty walking, sitting or standing and may even look uncomfortable.
- A girl or woman may spend longer than normal in the bathroom or toilet due to difficulties urinating. A girl may spend long periods of time away from a classroom during the day with bladder or menstrual problems.
- A girl or woman may have frequent urinary, menstrual or stomach problems.
- There may be prolonged or repeated absences from school or college.
- A prolonged absence from school or college with noticeable behaviour changes (e.g. withdrawal or depression) on the girl's return could be an indication that a girl has recently undergone FGM.
- A girl or woman may be particularly reluctant to undergo normal medical examinations.
- A girl or woman may confide in a professional.
- A girl or woman may ask for help, but may not be explicit about the problem due to embarrassment or fear.
- A girl may talk about pain or discomfort between her legs.

FGM IS AN ILLEGAL ACT PERFORMED ON A FEMALE, REGARDLESS OF HER AGE. **MANDATORY REPORTING** TO POLICE VIA TELEPHONE (CALL 101) - A HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL, TEACHER OR SOCIAL CARE PROFESSIONALS **MUST** MAKE A "FGM NOTIFICATION" TO THE POLICE IF, IN THE COURSE OF THEIR DUTIES, THEY DISCOVER THAT AN ACT OF FGM **IS KNOWN OR HAS BEEN SEEN** ON A GIRL UNDER 18. ANY CONCERNS REGARDING THIS SHOULD BE REPORTED, USING NORMAL SCHOOL SAFE GUARDING / CHILD PROTECTION PROCEDURES.



A GOOD
PROFESSIONAL IS
AWARE AND CARES!