

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

They don't have to cope alone

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a crime in this country. It is also a crime to take a British national or permanent resident abroad for FGM or to help someone trying to do this.

Girls may be taken to their countries of origin so that FGM can be carried out during the summer holidays, allowing them time to 'heal' before they return to school. There are also worries that some girls may have FGM performed in the UK.

What is FGM?

FGM refers to all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for cultural or other non-medical reasons. FGM has serious implications for the sexual and reproductive health of girls and women.

The effects of FGM depend on a number of factors, including the type performed, the expertise of the practitioner, the hygiene conditions under which it is performed, the amount of resistance and the general health condition of the girl undergoing the procedure.

Complications may occur in all types of FGM. Immediate complications include severe pain, shock, haemorrhage, tetanus or infection, urine retention, ulceration of the genital region and injury to adjacent tissue, wound infection, urinary infection, fever, and septicaemia. Haemorrhage and infection can be severe enough to cause death.

FGM procedures can also cause many psychological problems as well as problems with giving birth later in life - including the death of the baby.

There are no health benefits to FGM. Removing and damaging healthy and normal female genital tissue interferes with the natural functions of girls' and women's bodies.

It may be difficult to talk about the issue, but it is important they tell someone that this has happened to them, or that they think it may happen to them or someone they know.

FGM is illegal in the UK and is considered a human rights violation and a form of child abuse. FGM is often performed on girls between the ages of five and eight. However FGM can be performed on babies, teenagers, and sometimes even on adult women. The age differs from community to

community.

Estimates suggest

- **60,000** girls under 15 are at risk of FGM in the UK.
- **137,000** girls and women are living with the consequences of FGM in the UK.

Psychological complications

Studies show that FGM may affect a woman psychologically for the rest of her life. Some psychological effects include:

- Anger at the person who performed FGM or arranged for FGM to be carried out.
- Emotional distress, fear and feelings of helplessness.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder - symptoms can include flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety and depression for a long time after FGM.
- Sexual phobia resulting in fear and difficulties in having sex.
- Feelings of not being a 'whole' or a 'normal' girl or woman may be felt by some girls/women because of FGM.
- A woman's sexual pleasure is greatly decreased, this can have negative effects in a marriage and in sexual relations. However, FGM does not take away sexual desire. This is because sexual relations are more than physical; feelings such as love, passion and companionship are also important for pleasure.

FGM and the law

In the UK the FGM Act (2003) makes it illegal to help, support or arrange for FGM to be performed on a girl either in the UK or abroad. The offence can be punished by up to 14 years in prison, a fine, or both. Without engagement with affected communities to abandon FGM, laws alone will not be enough to end this practice.

Contacts

Female Genital Mutilation

Information and support

www.forwarduk.org.uk

Childline

Emotional support for children and young people on issues relating to child abuse, bullying etc.

0800 1111

www.childline.org.uk

School Nurse 020 8661 3904

Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

www.sutton.gov.uk/info/200235/safeguarding_children

FGM Police Unit

www.met.police.uk/advice-and-information/child-abuse/female-genitalmutilation-fgm/

Halo Project Charity

The Halo Project Charity is a national project that will support victims of honour-based violence, forced marriages and FGM.

01642 683 045

www.haloproject.org.uk

Refuge

For women and children against domestic violence.

Freephone 24-Hour National Domestic

Violence Helpline 0808 2000 247

www.refuge.org.uk/our-work/forms-of-violence-and-abuse/honour-based-violence/

The Havens Unit Camberwell

Rape and sexual assault referral centre.

020 3299 6900 (24 hour)

www.nhs.uk/ServiceDirectories/Pages/GenericServiceDetails.aspx?id=8564002