

Safeguarding Factsheet 7: Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

The basics

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is the collective term for all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It is also sometimes referred to as female genital cutting or female circumcision.

FGM has been categorised into four types, ranging from a symbolic prick to the clitoris or prepuce, to the fairly extensive removal and narrowing of the vaginal opening. All these forms of FGM have been found in the UK. FGM is a form of child abuse and violence against women.

The World Health Organisation estimates that between 100 and 140 million girls and women worldwide have experienced FGM and around 3 million girls undergo some form of procedure each year in Africa. It is practiced in 28 countries in Africa and some in the Middle East and Asia.

It is estimated that over 63,000 girls aged 0-13 were at risk of FGM in the UK each year (Dorkenoo et al, 2015)

Background and consequences

The age at which girls undergo FGM varies enormously according to the community. The procedure may be carried out when the girl is new born, during childhood or adolescence, just before marriage or during the first pregnancy. Some of the reasons given for the continued practice of FGM include; protecting family honour, preserving tradition, ensuring a woman's chastity, cleanliness and as a preparation for marriage.

FGM can have serious consequences for a woman's health and in some instances can lead to death. Infections, severe pain, bleeding and tetanus are just some of the short-term consequences. In the long-term women can suffer pain and discomfort during sex, chronic pain, infection, cysts, abscesses, difficulties with periods and fertility problems. Women also often suffer severe psychological trauma, including flashbacks and depression.

Communities at heightened risk of FGM

Women and girls in the UK from the following communities are at heightened risk of FGM:

Egyptian	Indonesian	Nigerian	Sudanese
Eritrean	Kenyan	Sierra Leonean	Yemeni
Ethiopian	Kurdish	Somalian	

Legislation

FGM is illegal in the UK; the legislation for England and Wales is the FGM Act 2003. FGM is a form of violence against women and is child abuse.

Section 5B of the FGM Act 2003 Act (as amended by the Serious Crime Act 2015) introduced a mandatory reporting duty which requires regulated health and social care professionals and teachers in England and Wales to report cases of FGM in under 18s which they identify in the course of their professional work to the police. This includes if they:

- are informed by a girl under 18 that an act of FGM has been carried out on her; or
- observe physical signs which appear to show that an act of FGM has been carried out on a girl under 18 and they have no reason to believe that the act was necessary for the girl's physical or mental health or for purposes connected with labour or birth

For the purposes of the duty, the relevant age is the girl's age at the time of the disclosure/identification of FGM (i.e. it does not apply where a woman aged 18 or over discloses she had FGM when she was under 18). For more information, please see: [Gov.uk Mandatory reporting of female genital mutilation: procedural information](#)

The Kirklees perspective

FGM is an unacceptable practice for which there is no justification. FGM is not acceptable or legal and the Kirklees Safeguarding Children's Partnership, Safeguarding Adult's Board and Community Safety Partnership in Kirklees are taking steps to proactively tackle the issue.

The Kirklees FGM strategy 2016 produced by all three boards is focused on preventing FGM through education and identifying women and girls at risk so that they can be protected from harm. Where FGM has occurred, the strategy ensures that appropriate support is put in place for the woman or girl's physical and emotional wellbeing.

Read [the Kirklees Strategy for Preventing Female Genital Mutilation \(FGM\)](#)