

One minute guide

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Number 6, February 2019

What is FGM

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is defined by the World Health Organisation as - all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genitalia for cultural or non-medical reasons.

There are 4 types of FGM, ranging from a symbolic prick/pierce/incision to the female genitalia to the extensive removal of all external genitalia and stitching/narrowing of the vaginal opening. In the UK, all forms of FGM are prevalent. There are no health benefits to FGM and the process is actively harmful to women and girls. FGM is mainly practised in 28 African countries, in parts of the Middle East and parts of Central and South America, although with increased immigration the practice has spread to Europe, North America and Australia.

There is no basis in any various religious writings for the practice of FGM, it is an ancient, deeply rooted cultural practice that varies between communities, tribes and families.

FGM and the Law

FGM is considered child abuse in the UK and has been illegal since 1985. It is also a criminal offence for those habitually resident in the UK (not just British citizens and nationals) to take their child abroad to have female genital mutilation, even if cutting is not illegal in that destination country. A parent or carer may be investigated for 'failure to protect' if that child is cut, even if they are not present. Anyone found guilty of the offence faces a maximum penalty of 14 years in prison.

What are the Health Risks of FGM

Immediate Risks— excruciating pain, shock, excessive bleeding, infections including tetanus, sepsis and HIV, organ damage, urine retention, death.

Long term risks—chronic pain, infections, abscesses, difficulty in menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth, infertility and damage to the reproductive system, recurrent bladder infections. PTSD, depression, flashbacks, self-harm and mental health problems.

FGM Indicators - The girl may confide that she is going to have a special procedure or ceremony that will make her a woman or ready for marriage. If the family belong to a community where FGM is practised there might be talk of a holiday or an absence from school. A female relative being cut is also an indicator.

Signs FGM has taken place - Prolonged absence from school with a noticeable change of behaviour upon return. Having difficulty walking, standing or sitting. Spending a long time in the toilets. A sudden change in dress. Appearing anxious, withdrawn or depressed.

Reporting

If you think a child may be at risk of FGM, you must seek help and advice. If you think a child is in immediate danger then contact the police on 999. If not:

- Inform your designated Child Protection Advisor who must inform Childrens Social Care
- Contact Childrens Social Care on 024 7678 8555

In 2015, a mandatory reporting duty came into force that requires health professionals, teachers and social care professionals to make a report to the police where, in the course of their professional duties, they either:

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 FGM has been carried out on a girl under 18

(Please note that the relevant age is the girl's age at the time of the disclosure/identification of FGM. It does not apply where a woman aged over 18 discloses FGM carried out when she was under 18.)

More info about **when** and **how** to report here - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mandatory-reporting-of-female-genital-mutilation-procedural-information>

What's an FGM Protection Order?

An FGMPO is a legal means to protect and safeguard victim and potential victims of FGM. They are granted by a court and contain conditions to protect for example, they could order the surrender of a passport to prevent the person at risk being taken abroad.

Anyone (including children under 18) can apply for a FGMPO for themselves or somebody else. There is no charge.

Find out more at <https://www.gov.uk/female-genital-mutilation-protection-order>

The Coventry Picture

In Coventry during 2016-2017, health agencies newly recorded **60** instances of FGM. In 2017 West Midlands Police recorded **153** referrals in the region with **32** of those in Coventry.

These are only the cases we know about, the actual numbers are likely to be much higher.

Petals – the UK's first FGM web app

The Petals app was created by Coventry University and is a web based (not mobile) app resource for young people, explaining what FGM is, with facts, info, answers to a range of FAQs, case studies of young people who speak out against FGM and a glossary to help young girls understand words they may not have seen before. It also provides info on how to access the app confidentially, the app is as untraceable as possible.

Petals app for young people - <http://petals.coventry.ac.uk/>

Petals app for professionals - <http://petals.coventry.ac.uk/professionals/>

National Resources and Further Information

The NSPCC FGM Helpline (free, anonymous and always open) on 0800 028 3550 or by emailing them at fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk

Childline (helpline for children, free and always open) 0800 1111

FGM Protection Order – more info at <https://www.gov.uk/female-genital-mutilation-protection-order>

Local Resources and Further Information

Coventry Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre (CRASAC) - Telephone - 02476 277777 website: <http://www.crasac.org.uk>

Coventry Haven Telephone - 02476 444077 (Monday - Friday 9am-4.30pm) Website - <https://www.coventryhaven.co.uk>