# female genital mutilation

## the facts



# female genital mutilation is a violation of human rights

Female Genital Mutilation comprises 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.

There are 4 known types of FGM, ranging from a symbolic prick to the clitoris or prepuce to the fairly extensive removal and narrowing of the vagina opening. All these forms of FGM have been found in the UK.

FGM is sometimes known as ‘female genital cutting’ or female circumcision. Communities tend to use local names for referring to this practice, including ‘sunna’.

**FGM is considered a grave violation of the rights of girls and women.**

# fgm affects girls and women in the uk

The World Health Organisation estimates that 3 million girls undergo some form of the procedure every year. It is practiced in 28 countries in Africa and some in the Middle East and Asia. FGM is also found in the UK amongst members of migrant communities. It is estimated that up to 24,000 girls in the UK, under the age of 15 are at risk of FGM.[1]

UK communities that are most at risk of FGM include Kenyans, Somalis, Sudanese, Sierra Leoneans, Egyptians, Nigerians and Eritreans. Non African countries that practise FGM include Yemeni, Afghani, Kurdish, Indonesian and Pakistani.

1 Dorkenoo et al, 2007. Available from FORWARD UK.



# fgm is illegal in the uk

**The Female Genital Mutilation Act of 2003:**

- makes it **illegal** to practice FGM in the UK
- makes it **illegal** to take girls who are British nationals or permanent residents of the UK abroad for FGM whether or not it is lawful in that country
- makes it **illegal** to aid, abet, counsel or procure the carrying out of FGM abroad
- has a penalty of up to **14 years in prison** and/or a fine.

## fgm is child abuse

**Usually it is a girl's parents or her extended family who 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, cleanliness and as a preparation for marriage.

Whilst FGM is often seen as an act of love, rather then 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.



## fgm can kill

- **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.

## fgm can affect pregnancy and childbirth

Women who have had Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) are 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.[2]

## fgm is not supported by any religious doctrine

Female Genital Mutilation is not a religious requirement or obligation. FGM has no link with Islam and is neither a requirement nor a Sunna in Islam. Globally most Muslims do not practise FGM.

FGM is not condoned by Christian teachings or the bible.

2 World Health Organisation 2006



## what are the signs that a girl may be at risk of fgm or has undergone fgm?

**Suspicions may arise in a number of ways that a child is being prepared for FGM to take place abroad**. These include knowing both 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 or other activities with noticeable behaviour change on return, possibly with bladder or menstrual problems. Some teachers have described how children find it difficult to sit still and look uncomfortable, or may complain about pain between their legs, or talk of something somebody did to them that they are not allowed to talk about.

## what to do if you are concerned about someone who is at risk of fgm

- 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 a child protection advisor and make a referral to Children's social care.
- Go to **www.fco.gov.uk/fgm** for more information

## what to do if you have had fgm done?

You can seek medical advice and help from specialist health services. There are 15 specialist clinics around the UK and in some of these you can have a reversal procedure.

Go to **www.fco.gov.uk/fgm** for more information



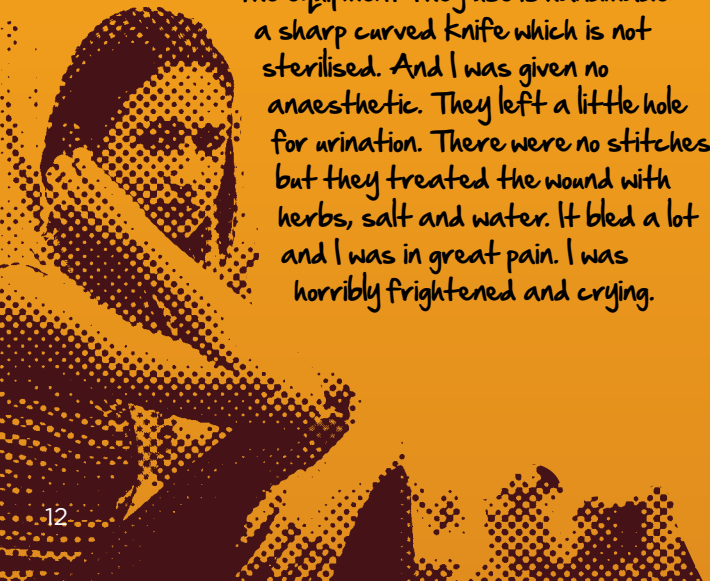
## what to do if you are worried you may be at risk of fgm?

- Talk to someone you trust, maybe a teacher or a school nurse. They are here to help and protect you.
- Remember that no one is allowed to hurt you physically or emotionally and FGM is not allowed in this country.
- You can get help. Go to **www.fco.gov.uk/fgm** for more information.



# case study

When I was "circumcised" I was five or six. It started as a ceremony – I was bought clothes, gold earrings and bangles. I had henna put on my hands and feet, it was like a celebration and I was the centre of attention.



The equipment they use is handmade: a sharp curved knife which is not sterilised. And I was given no anaesthetic. They left a little hole for urination. There were no stitches but they treated the wound with herbs, salt and water. It bled a lot and I was in great pain. I was horribly frightened and crying.

I came to the UK to study and about the same time suffered a great deal of bleeding and pain, so I went to hospital. It turned out that when they carried out the procedure they left part of one of my labia inside me, so the UK doctors operated to get rid of it.

Many families in Britain take girls to their country of origin to have FGM carried out. It is a holiday, they see family and the countryside and are then "circumcised". When they return, they tell the girl not to talk about it. They say the government will take her away from her family, and that she will lose all she has in the UK.

Many in my generation are fighting it. These days people are more aware, and I know many educated women who will not practice it. They say – "We have had enough!"

Bint al-Sultan – Manor Gardens Advocacy Project

**go to www.fco.gov.uk/fgm**

**for more information**

# where to go for further help or information

**Foreign and Commonwealth Office**
020 7008 1500
www.fco.gov.uk/fgm

**Metropolitan Police**
Child Abuse Investigation
Command/Project Azure
020 7161 2888

**Child Protection Helpline**
0808 800 5000 (advice for adults worried about a child)

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

**National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)**
www.nspcc.org.uk
0808 800 5000

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





Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Home Office

Department of Health

department for children, schools and families

www.fco.gov.uk/fgm