

FGM

You 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 to tell someone that this has happened to you, or that you think it may happen to yourself or someone you 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.

- 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.

How can I get help?

If you think you or another girl or woman is at risk of FGM it is important to speak up now. If there is immediate risk call the police on 999.

If the girl or woman has already been taken abroad, you should phone the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 020 7008 1500.

NSPCC have a helpline dedicated to FGM that is anonymous and open 24/7, you can call them on 0800 028 3550.

Your Local Social Services Department will be able to protect you or provide support, you can contact them through your local council HYPERLINK "http://www.gov.uk/find-your-localcouncil" www.gov.uk/find-your-localcouncil .

Your Local Police Child Protection Unit will be able to protect you or provide support, you can contact them through your local police station.

For more information on services available and one-to-one support you can call FORWARD on 0208 960 4000. We are open Monday to Friday from 9:30 am to 5:30 pm or email us at support@forwarduk.org.uk

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.