

# Female Genital Mutilation: School Bulletin

July 2015

## What is FGM?

FGM includes any mutilation of a girl's or woman's genitals, including the partial or total removal of the external genitalia for so-called cultural or other non-medical reasons. FGM is medically unnecessary, extremely painful and has serious health consequences, both at the time when the mutilation is carried out and in later life.

It has been estimated that over 20,000 girls under the age of 15 are at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM) in the UK each year, and that 66,000 women in the UK are living with the consequences of FGM.

## FGM – The Law

FGM is illegal in the UK and is a child protection issue. Under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 it is an offence:

- to subject a girl or woman to FGM in the UK
- to assist a girl to perform it on herself
- for UK nationals or permanent residents to perform FGM abroad; or to assist anyone to perform FGM abroad.

If caught, offenders face a large fine and a prison sentence of up to 14 years.

**The 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.

FGM is a criminal and a child protection matter. It is illegal to subject, assist or perform FGM and it constitutes significant harm to a child or young person. If you are worried about someone who is at risk of FGM or has had FGM, you must share this information with Haringey Children and Young Peoples Service or the police. It is then their responsibility to investigate and to protect the individuals concerned.

## Indicators that a girl may be at risk of FGM

- She has a parent from a practising community **AND**
- She and her family have a low level of integration into a community
- The mother or any sisters have experienced FGM
- She is withdrawn from PSHE
- She has talked about, or you know about, the arrival of a female family elder
- She talks about it to other children
- She refers to a 'special procedure' or 'special occasion' or 'become a woman'
- She is out of the country for a prolonged period
- She is taking a long holiday to her country of origin or another country where the practice is prevalent (parents may talk about it too).

## Indicators that a girl has experienced FGM

- She has problems walking/standing/sitting
- She spends a lot of time in the bathroom/toilet
- She has bladder or menstrual problems
- She has prolonged or repeated absences from school
- She has a reluctance to undergo medical examinations
- She is asking for help but giving a lack of explicit information.

## Safeguarding and FGM

Safeguarding girls at risk of harm through FGM poses specific challenges because it is a hidden problem: families may give no other cause for concern with regard to their parenting or relationships with their children; victims can be unaware of the risks or reluctant to tell anyone outside of their community. There remains a **duty for all professionals to act to safeguard girls at risk of FGM under the law and in the statutory guidance**, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015.

**Anyone who has information that a child is potentially or actually at risk of significant harm should inform Haringey Children and Young People Service or the police.** The London FGM procedures state that “any female child born to a woman who has been subjected to FGM must be considered to be at risk, as must other female children in the extended family”.

### What should schools do?

**Girls may be most at risk during the long summer holiday, so staff may wish to pay particular attention in the summer term, and when girls return to school or college in the autumn.**

Any member of staff may make a referral to Haringey Children and Young People Service, but in most cases staff should initially share their concerns with the school's or college's Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Haringey Children and Young People Service will exercise its duties and make enquiries to safeguard under the Children Act 1989 if it has reason to believe that a girl is likely to be subjected to, or has been subjected to FGM.

All efforts should be made to establish the full facts from the child/young person at the earliest opportunity. If there is an indication that the child or young person is at risk of FGM or has undergone FGM, or she has expressed fears of reprisals or violence, the information must be shared with Haringey

## Do's and Don'ts

### Staff should:

- ✓ talk about FGM in a professional and sensitive manner.
- ✓ explain that FGM is illegal in the UK and that they will be protected by the law.
- ✓ recognise and respect their wishes where possible, but child welfare must be paramount. FGM is child abuse and against the law. If a member of staff believes that the girl is at risk of FGM, or has already undergone FGM, the police and social services must be informed even if this is against the girl's wishes. If you do take action against the student's wishes, you must inform them of the reasons why.
- ✓ activate local safeguarding procedures, using existing national and local protocols for multi-agency liaison with the police and children's or adults' social care.
- ✓ ensure that the girl is informed of the long-term health consequences of FGM to encourage her to seek and accept medical assistance.
- ✓ liaise with the designated teacher with responsibility for safeguarding children.
- ✓ refer the student, with their consent, to appropriate medical help, counselling and local and national support groups.
- ✓ ensure that safeguarding and protection is considered for any female family members.

### Staff should not:

- ✗ treat such allegations merely as a domestic issue or ignore as a cultural tradition.
- ✗ ignore what the student has told them or dismiss out of hand the need for immediate protection.
- ✗ decide that it is not their responsibility to follow up the allegation.
- ✗ approach the student's family or those with influence within the community, in advance of any enquiries by the police, Haringey Children and Young People Service (either by telephone or letter).

*Taken from HM Government Multi Agency Practice Guidance: Female Genital Mutilation*

Children and Young People Service and the police.

It is not the role of teachers, lecturers and staff to investigate concerns raised using the child safeguarding procedures to Haringey Children and Young People Service or the police.

## Useful contacts

Haringey Children and Young People Service

[www.haringey.gov.uk/children-and-families/childrens-social-care/child-protection](http://www.haringey.gov.uk/children-and-families/childrens-social-care/child-protection)

020 8489 4592 / 5652 / 5762 / 4582 during office hours

(Monday to Thursday 8.45am to 5pm; Friday 8.45am to 4.45pm)

Or:

020 8489 0000 Out of Office hours (including weekends)

Met Police – Project Azure

<http://content.met.police.uk/Article/Female-genital-mutilation/1400009693144/1400009693144>

0207 161 2888

[azure@met.police.uk](mailto:azure@met.police.uk)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office on

+44 (0) 20 7008 1500

NSPCC FGM Helpline: 0800 028 3550

Email: [fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk)

## Useful resources

Chapter 9 for Schools: HM Government Multi Agency Practice Guidance: Female Genital Mutilation:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-genital-mutilation-guidelines>

Statement opposing Female Genital Mutilation:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statement-opposing-female-genital-mutilation>

This bulletin has been produced by Haringey's Violence Against Women and Girls partnership, through the Harmful Practices Working Group. For more information please contact:

Danielle Davis

Interim Violence Against Women and Girls Coordinator

[danielle.davis@haringey.gov.uk](mailto:danielle.davis@haringey.gov.uk)

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**Sir Paul Ennals**

Independent Chair

Haringey Local Safeguarding Children Board

**Jeanelle De Gruchy**

Director Public Health, London Borough of Haringey

Chair of the Haringey Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy Group

