



Department
of Health

More information about FGM

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a procedure where the female genital organs are injured or changed, but there is no medical reason for this. It can seriously harm women and girls' health in the long term. Some girls die from blood loss or infection as a direct result of the procedure. Women who have had FGM are also likely to experience difficulty in childbirth.

FGM is usually carried out on girls between the ages of 5 and 10. It can be known as female circumcision, cutting or by other terms such as sunna, gudniin, halalays, tahur, megrez and khitan among other names.

Types of FGM:

Type 1 – removing some or all of the clitoris

Type 2 – removing some or all of both the clitoris and the small labia (the “lips” that surround the vagina).

Type 3 – removing some or all of the female genitalia, including the clitoris. Sewing the edges together to leave a small hole.

Type 4 – all other types of harm, including cutting, burning, scraping, pricking and stretching the female genitals.

Why does FGM happen?

It is usually a girl's parents or extended family who arrange for her to have FGM. Reasons for doing it include:

- custom
- religion
- preserving tradition
- preserving virginity
- cleanliness
- protecting family honour
- social acceptance, especially in relation to marriage

These reasons for FGM are based on misunderstanding or lack of awareness.

Some believe FGM is required as part of their religion, for example Type 1 FGM is sometimes mistakenly called *sunna*. But there are **no** religious texts which support FGM or say it should be done.

FGM is illegal

FGM is illegal and must **never** be carried out either here or abroad. It is also illegal to help someone to carry out FGM in any way. Anyone found guilty of this faces up to 14 years in prison may be fined (made to pay a financial penalty).

FGM causes serious harm to your health

FGM causes serious harm to girls and women, including:

- constant pain
- repeated infections which can lead to infertility
- bleeding, cysts and abscesses
- problems passing urine or incontinence
- depression, flashbacks, self-harm
- labour/childbirth problems which can lead to death

What help can you get?

If you have had FGM, you can get medical help and support from your GP or any other healthcare professional. You can get help from your midwife if you are pregnant.

You can also find details of specialist FGM clinics and services at www.nhs.uk/fgm.

If you are concerned about any girl who may be at risk of FGM, tell the health professional treating you or phone the NSPCC helpline 0800 028 3550, 24hrs a day.

If you are worried that you may be pressured by your family or community to have FGM performed on your daughter, ask your GP, health visitor or any other healthcare professional for help.

Health Passport

You can ask for copies of 'A statement opposing Female Genital Mutilation'. This is a pocket sized printed statement, available in 11 languages which you can take with you when you go abroad. You can show it to your family. It makes clear that FGM is a serious criminal offence in the UK.

Collecting and using information from patients with FGM

NHS Digital is collecting data about FGM in England on behalf of the Department of Health and NHS England. This data collection is called the FGM Enhanced Dataset – www.content.digital.nhs.uk/fgm. The data collected is used to produce information that helps to improve how the NHS cares for women and girls who have had or who are at risk of FGM.

NHS Digital collects some 'personal confidential information' about you such as your name, date of birth, NHS number and country of origin. It also collects information specific to FGM. This includes the type of FGM, your age when FGM occurred, the country where FGM took place and any family history of FGM.

GPs and other healthcare providers are legally required to provide this information to NHS Digital, however you can object to your personal confidential information being shared. You can speak to your health professional about how to do this. Or to find out more about the way your data is used and managed, including about how NHS Digital maintain the confidentiality of information, and to register any objections please go to:

www.content.digital.nhs.uk/patientconf

If you would like more information about FGM, please go to www.nhs.uk/fgm

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