

Female Genital Mutilation – a briefing in response to question asked at Inner South Area Committee on Wednesday 19th March 2014.

Extracted from minutes of ISAC on 19th March 2014:

At the invitation of the Chair a member of the public raised the issue of female genital mutilation which affects some communities in the Inner South area. Members agreed this was an important issue and would consider the best way to approach it.

This paper provides a brief summary of the current position in Leeds and links to other resources.

Lead officers from Citizens and Communities have provided the following responses:

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) has been raised as an issue in the report that is going to the Corporate Leadership Team of Leeds City Council in May. It forms part of the cross council approach to migration, and has been identified as an issue that needs better co-ordination.

Through the Migration Partnership census data has been provided to some third sector organisations making funding bids these include:

- The People who Help People Foundation have applied for Home Office funding to train front line professionals in understanding FGM, prevention and support and they will be working with BHI to have a regional conference for front line professionals in the Autumn.
- NHS - there has been some work by the specialist midwives in St James' and LGI to work with women who have been mutilated – as this often results in needing a caesarean. They have appointed a liaison worker now, who is also working on prevention so that the families they come into contact with are not passing it on a generation.
- Refugee Council has/had a health befriender network who was working with target communities to prevent FGM

There is a domestic violence scrutiny inquiry that has formally included FGM within it. Recent meetings of this group have discussed the work that is taking place to recognise and address FGM (both in the council and outside it) but there is more to be done. The final report will be considered and signed off at the scrutiny meeting in June.

The cross council safeguarding group will also receive a briefing in May in order to explore how we can work together on this issue.



FGM (Female Genital Mutilation)

What is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

'Female genital mutilation (FGM) constitutes all procedures which involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural or any other non-therapeutic reasons.' (ACCM Sheffield)

World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that between **100 and 132 million girls and women** have been subjected to FGM.

Each year, a further **2 million girls** are estimated to be at risk of the practice.

6,000 girls/women undergo the procedure every day

66,000 women aged between 15 and 49 have been subjected to FGM in England and Wales

33,000 girls under 15 are at risk (FORWARD and City of University- Oct 2007)

10% of women who have had FGM die from short-term effects (urinary infections , childbirth complications)

25% die from recurrent problems (haemorrhaging) and shock.

FGM doubles the chance of women dying in childbirth.

Most of them live in African countries, a few in the Middle East and Asian countries, and increasingly in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and United States of America and Canada.

Depending on the degree of mutilation, FGM can have number of short term health implications: severe pain and shock; infection; urine retention; injury to adjacent tissues; immediate fatal haemorrhaging and even death. Long term health implication can entail: extensive damage of the external reproductive system; uterus, vaginal and pelvic infections; complications in pregnancy and birth; psychological damage; sexual dysfunction; difficulties in menstruation.

FGM is predominantly performed on girls aged between 3 and 13 years although there are cases where this can happen even younger or is performed on girls over the age of 13 years. FGM is normally arranged by the girl's mother or grandmother and is usually undertaken by either a traditional birth attendant, midwife or professional excisor. FGM is often performed using unhygienic instruments and with no pain relief.

This is a traditional practice, which is cultural and not religious, as some would have you believe. This practice gives social acceptance especially for marriage; family honour; enhancing fertility; a sense of belonging to a group and conversely the fear of social exclusion and religion in the mistaken belief that it is acceptable.

In some societies uncircumcised girls are considered dirty and circumcised girls are pure. It is an attempt to preserve a woman's virginity and chastity, to suppress her sexuality and sexual activity. Uncircumcised girls are often seen as unfit for marriage. In some refugee communities it is feared that if FGM is not performed this can lead to ostracism if they are repatriated and thus will never be a part of the community.

Current Responses

The Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development (FORWARD), the London Central Mosque Trust and the Islamic Cultural Centre (ICC) welcome the break through announcements by top Muslim clerics to dissociate Islam from Female Genital Mutilation (FORWARD Feb 2007).

FGM is illegal in the UK under the new Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 and under the Children Acts 1989 and 2004. These laws exist to protect women and children in the UK. Parents can be prosecuted on return to UK if FGM is carried out on a child whilst out of the country.

Good Practice

- To understand that FGM is a tool of abuse.
- Be more aware of the complex reasons why FGM occurs but clear about the fact that it constitutes abuse.
- Prevention requires sensitive community education and intervention. Well-informed and trained interpreters are essential.
- Contact a specialist organisation that has been dealing with FGM if unsure about dealing with any cases.
- Be sensitive in your use of language as some words can be culturally offensive. Do not judge or make assumptions about women's experience of FGM.

Websites:

www.accmsheffield.org

www.forwarduk.org.uk

www.afruca.org

Ending violence against women and girls: updated action plan for 2014

The Home Office has published an updated action plan for ending violence against women and girls. The plan sets out the government's achievements to date and outlines where activities will be focussed over the coming year in response to emerging challenges, including supporting schools to do work on sexual consent, sexual violence and safeguarding and continuing to tackle issues around female genital mutilation (FGM).

[>Home Office - 2014 action plan announcement](#)

[>Action Plan 2014](#)