

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) - Information

Definition of FGM

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines female genital mutilation as “all procedures (not medical operations) which involve partial removal or total removal of the external female genitalia or injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons” (WHO, 1996)

The practice of FGM is illegal in the UK. For the purposes of the criminal law in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, FGM is mutilation of the labia majora or labia minora. .

FGM is prevalent in 28 African countries as well as parts of the Middle East and Asia. FGM is carried out for cultural, religious and social reasons within families and communities. The school holidays in particular are when many young girls are taken abroad, often to their family's birth country, to have FGM performed. UK communities that are most at risk of FGM include Kenyan, Somalian, Sudanese, Sierra Leonean, Egyptian, Nigerian and Eritrean. Non - African communities that practise FGM include Yemeni, Afghani, Kurdish, Indonesian and Pakistani.

FGM constitutes a form of child abuse and violence against women and girls, and has severe and short-term and long-term physical and psychological consequences. 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. Long term issues include chronic pain and fertility problems. Woman also often suffer severe psychological trauma, including flashbacks and depression.

Identifying girls at risk of FGM is not straight forward because:

- It may be the only incidence of child abuse; usually from what is otherwise a loving family.
- There are rarely reasons for routine medical examinations, so they are not routinely seen by people outside the family.
- Girls are unlikely to disclose FGM for fear of the consequences to and from family members and the wider community.
- Any girl withdrawn from Personal, Social and Health Education may be at risk as a result of her parents wishing to keep her uninformed about her body and rights.
- It is believed that communities less integrated into British society are more likely to carry out FGM.

Indications that FGM may be about to take place include:

- The family comes from a community that is known to practise FGM.
- A child may talk about a long holiday to her country of origin or another country where the practice is prevalent.
- A child may confide to a professional that she is to have a “special procedure” or to attend a special occasion.

Indications that FGM may have already taken place include:

- Signs include difficulty walking, sitting or standing
- A child may spend long periods of time away from the classroom during the day with bladder or menstrual problems.
- A prolonged unexplained absence from school.
- A child being excused from physical exercise lessons without the support of a medical letter (from GP).
- Reluctance to undergo normal medical examinations.
- Asking for help but not being explicit due to embarrassment or fear.

If professionals can identify signs that FGM has already taken place:

- The girl or women affected can be offered help to deal with the consequences of FGM.
- Enquiries can be made about the family members who may need to be safeguarded from harm.
- Criminal investigations into the perpetrators and to protect others from harm.

Where a child is thought to be at risk of FGM, practitioners should be alert to the need to act quickly – before the child is abused through FGM procedure in the UK or taken abroad to undergo the procedure.

Any indication or concern that a child is at immediate risk of, or has undergone FGM should be treated as an urgent Child Protection issue in school and the information shared in line with Berwick Academy's Child Protection Policy and Procedure.

Who can you contact for advice?

Berwick Academy

Designated Child Protection

Mrs D Tait or Mr M Wickens Assistant Headteacher

Call the FGM helpline It's free, anonymous and open 24/7. [0800 028 3550](tel:08000283550)

Information on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=7570>

Childline

Helpline: 0800 1111

Website: www.childline.org.uk

NSPCC

FGM helpline: 0808 028 3550

Website: www.nspcc.org.uk

Metropolitan Police (Project Azure – FGM)

Helpline: 0207 161 2888

Crimestoppers

Helpline: 0800 555 111

Website: <https://crimestoppers-uk.org/>

Foundation for Women's Health Research & Development (FORWARD)

Helpline: 0208 960 4000

Website: <http://www.forwarduk.org.uk/>

Equality Now

Telephone: 0207 304 6902

Website: www.equalitynow.org

Daughters of Eve

Text: 07983 030 488

Website: www.dofeve.org