**What is Female Genital Mutilation?**

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as “all procedures which involve the partial or total removal of the externalgenitalia or injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural or any other non-medical reasons”. Communities may use different terminology for FGM, for example circumcision, Sunna or excision. For a full range of terminology please [click here.](http://nationalfgmcentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/FGM-Terminology-for-Website.pdf) The WHO classifies FGM into four different types, for more details on the different types of FGM please [click here](http://nationalfgmcentre.org.uk/fgm/).

FGM is child abuse and a form of violence against women and girls, there are no medical benefits to FGM and it is a way of controlling or removing women and girl’s sexuality.

Although FGM predominantly takes place in countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, it is an issue affecting women and girls across the globe, particularly as the migration of people continually increases. To explore a prevalence map of where FGM is practiced please click here.

FGM can happen to girls from birth through to adulthood, but is most common from infancy to aged 16. It is estimated that 130,000 women and girls in the UK have had FGM and no Local Authority in the UK is free from women affected by FGM.

**Why do people perform FGM?**

Religion and culture can be given as a reason for performing FGM. There is no religious justification for FGM and the practice pre-dates all religions. Religious leaders and organisations from across the UK have [written a joint statement condemning the practice](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/faith-and-community-leaders-unite-to-condemn-fgm).

Affected communities perform FGM for different reasons, for example believing it will prevent girls from having sex outside of marriage, supressing a girl’s sexual urges, making a girl clean or pure, or as a pre-requisite for marriage.

FGM is a complex issue and despite the harm it causes, women and men from affected communities may consider it to be an essential practice to ensure their daughter’s marriageability and place within a community.

**What is the impact of FGM?**

Short term health implications include:

Severe pain, damage to surrounding tissue, blood loss, difficulty passing urine, infection including HIV and death.

Long term health implications include:

Difficulty passing urine, painful menstruation, scarring, reoccurring infections, trouble having sex and conceiving, complexities in child birth, fistulas and cysts, depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), psychosexual problems.

Every girl and woman experiences FGM differently, it is important to listen to the girl or woman and value their unique experience.

**What does the law say?**

FGM has been illegal in the UK since 1985. [The Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/31/contents) states:

* It is illegal to perform FGM in the UK or abroad
* It is illegal to assist the carrying our of FGM in the UK or abroad
* It is illegal to assist a girl to carry out FGM on herself in the UK or abroad
* If found guilty of an offence the individual will be liable to a maximum of 14 years imprisonment and/or a fine

[The Serious Crime Act 2015](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/9/contents/enacted) states:

* A person with parental or caring responsibility towards a girl that fails to protect them from FGM is committing an offence and faces up to seven years in prison and/or a fine
* An extension of protection from FGM to girls who are ‘habitually resident’ in the UK, for example students

Since October 2015 registered professionals have a duty to complete Mandatory Reporting under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003. Professionals must contact 101 if they are directly informed by a girl under 18 that she has undergone FGM or if they observe FGM on a girl under 18. This is a personal duty which should be completed alongside normal safeguarding procedures. For more information on Mandatory Reporting [please click here.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fact-sheet-on-mandatory-reporting-of-female-genital-mutilation)

**How to identify FGM and protect girls**

**Risk indicators:**

* One or both of a girl’s parents come from a community affected by FGM and either the parents, wider family or community consider FGM an integral part of their culture or religious identity
* A girl’s older sibling or female relative, for example a cousin, has undergone FGM
* A girl seeks help from friends, adults, teachers or other professionals about FGM
* A girl talks about a ‘special procedure’ or an event to ‘become a woman’
* Parents are taking the child out of the country for a prolonged period, this may be to a country where FGM is prevalent

If you are a social worker, please [click here to complete an FGM risk assessment](http://nationalfgmcentre.org.uk/fgm-assessment-tool/) or [click here for a risk assessment for health professionals](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/576051/FGM_risk_assessment_templates.pdf) to consider further risk indicators to inform your decision making.

**Signs FGM may have occurred:**

* Prolonged absence from schools
* Frequently needing to go to the toilet and taking a long time to urinate
* Reoccurring urinary tract infections
* Noticeable behaviour changes
* Change of dress from tight to loose fitting clothing
* Menstrual problems
* Difficulty in sitting down comfortably or complaining about pain between their legs
* Talk of something somebody did to them that they are not allowed to talk about

Female genital mutilation is child abuse, and requires a child protection response. If you are concerned about a child being at risk of FGM please contact Harrow MASH or the police if the child is felt to be at immediate risk of harm. [Guidance for a good referral around FGM can be found here.](http://nationalfgmcentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Referral-Guide-.pdf)

Local Authorities, professionals, families and girls themselves can apply to the courts for a Female Genital Mutilation Protection Order (FGMPO) if they are concerned about FGM taking place. These Orders support in protecting girls, educating families and preventing FGM. For more details about FGMPO [please click here](http://nationalfgmcentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/FGMPO-Leaflet.pdf).

Harrow works with the [National FGM Centre](http://nationalfgmcentre.org.uk/), and any concerns relating to FGM should be shared with the FGM lead social worker Charlotte Jamieson on email charlotte.jamieson@harrow.gov.uk or by calling 07732800589.

The NSPCC also provide an FGM helpline on 0800 028 3550. If you are concerned that a British citizen may be taken overseas for the purpose of FGM please call the Foreign and Commonwealth Office FCO on 0207 008 1500 or email fgm@fco.gov.uk.

Northwick Park Hospital provide a [specialist FGM clinic](https://www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/aboutnhsservices/sexual-health-services/documents/list%20of%20fgm%20clinics%20mar%2014%20final.pdf) for women in Harrow on Friday mornings from 9.00 until 13.00, for pregnant and non-pregnant women, they can be contacted on 0208 869 2870.

You can provide [a statement opposing FGM](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statement-opposing-female-genital-mutilation) to families you are working with in their chosen language, which can be taken with them when they travel abroad to show their opposition to FGM.

**How can I further my knowledge of FGM?**

Complete the free online training designed by the Virtual College for the Home Office by [clicking here](https://www.virtual-college.co.uk/resources/free-courses/recognising-and-preventing-fgm).

Contact Charlotte Jamieson FGM lead to discuss presentations for professionals and community groups in Harrow.

Attend the National FGM Centre training for Harrow professionals on FGM, Breast Flattening and Child Abuse linked to Faith and Belief. This can be accessed by visiting the [Harrow learning pool](https://harrow.learningpool.com/login/index.php).

[Norbury Primary School](https://www.norbury.harrow.sch.uk/fgm) in Harrow is an award winning Level 2 UNICEF school. They have created lesson plans to teach FGM and are a knowledge centre supporting other schools in teaching FGM. [Watch their video](https://www.norbury.harrow.sch.uk/fgm/fgm-awareness-video) to learn about how they implemented learning about FGM in their school.

The government have a [webpage for health professionals](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/female-genital-mutilation-fgm-guidance-for-healthcare-staff), including details about the NHS enhanced dataset, NHS risk assessments and video clips.

The Government’s Multi-Agency Statutory FGM guidance can be [viewed here.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multi-agency-statutory-guidance-on-female-genital-mutilation)

The London Safeguarding Children’s Board FGM guidance can be [viewed here](https://www.londoncp.co.uk/chapters/sg_ch_risk_fgm.html).