



Safeguarding Children From Female Genital Mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) refers to procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. Other terms used include sunna, circumcision, initiation or cut. In June 2015 the Government issued 'A Statement Opposing Female Genital Mutilation' in which this practice was identified as child abuse that can have 'devastating health consequences for girls and women'.

The cultural background of FGM is one of the reasons that inhibit women from seeking help. The World Health Organisation estimates that, in the UK, around 137,000 women have undergone FGM and some 60,000 girls under the age of 15 are at risk of such (www.gov.uk). FGM is carried out on girls as young as 5 years old and, in some countries, it is carried out shortly after birth. Despite it being illegal in the UK, recent statistics detail that "between April 2021 and March 2022 there were 11,890 total attendances at NHS Trusts and GP practices where FGM was identified. Of these, 5,620 women and girls had attended hospital (digital.nhs.co.uk).

FGM is prevalent in at least 30 countries, from the Atlantic coast to the Horn of Africa, areas of the Middle East and some Asian countries. In many of these cultures, it is a deeply embedded social norm, practiced by families for a variety of complex reasons. For instance, it is often thought to be essential for a girl to experience FGM if she is to become a marriageable woman. In contrast however, the practice is not seen as essential to the beliefs of any faith.

Some of the reasons given for FGM being carried out are:

- It brings status and respect.
- It preserves a girl's virginity/chastity.
- It is a rite of passage.
- It gives a girl social acceptance, especially for marriage.
- It upholds the family honour.
- It cleanses and purifies.
- It gives the girl and her family a sense of belonging to the community.
- It rids the family of bad luck or evil spirits.
- It is incorrectly believed to make childbirth safer for an infant.
- It is aesthetically desirable.
- It perpetuates a custom/tradition.

Symptoms of FGM include:

- Difficulty urinating
- Incontinence
- Frequent or chronic vaginal, pelvic or urinary infections

- Menstrual problems
- Kidney damage and possible failure
- Cysts and abscesses
- Pain when having sex
- Infertility
- Complications during pregnancy and childbirth
- Emotional and mental health problems
- Shock due to loss of blood

Action to be Taken

It is now mandatory to report FGM and AFA staff must, as soon as they are aware of a disclosure, or a concern that such may have taken place or is being arranged, contact the Designated Safeguarding Lead or other Senior Manager and refer to Safeguarding procedures. In an emergency, the Police and Ambulance Service should be contacted directly.

FGM is a serious criminal offence which carries a penalty of up to 14 years in prison for anyone committing or helping someone to commit it. If FGM is committed, each person who has been responsible for a child whilst it has been carried out is considered guilty of an offence.

For further information

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/female-genital-mutilation-fgm/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multi-agency-statutory-guidance-on-female-genital-mutilation>

<https://www.gov.uk/female-genital-mutilation-help-advice>

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation>

<https://www.endfgm.eu/female-genital-mutilation/what-is-fgm/>

Also refer to:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/942454/Working_together_to_safeguard_children_inter_agency_guidance.pdf

Connected Policies or Guidance

Name of Policy / Guidance	Relevant for
Record Keeping and Confidentiality Policy	All staff and Foster Parents
Safeguarding Policy	All staff and Foster Parents
Foster Parent Handbook	Foster Parents, Fostering Social Workers
Safeguarding Children from Honour-Based Violence	All staff and Foster Parents

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