

female. genital mutilation

Each year thousands of school girls across Greater Manchester could be at risk of mutilation at the hands of their families. Girls as young as six from across the region are likely to be taken abroad over the holidays for the procedure or cutters are flown into the Manchester area. This custom is practiced largely among African and Middle Eastern communities and also in some Asian communities.

Greater Manchester has one of the highest number of cases in Britain and, worryingly, this illegal procedure is only increasing.

We see it as abuse, but female genital mutilation (also known as female circumcision) is seen by many in Somali, Egyptian, Sudanese and Middle Eastern communities as essential to preserve a girl's purity and honour.

What is it?

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is any procedure which involves the partial or complete removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for no medical reason. Many believe that FGM is necessary to ensure acceptance by their community, however this custom is against the law in the UK and many other countries.

All types of FGM are illegal in the UK; it is an offence to take a female out of the UK for FGM or for anyone to circumcise women or children for cultural or non-medical reasons here in the UK.

Types of FGM

FGM Type 1 Sunna – removal of the hood of the clitoris.

FGM Type 2 Excision – removal of the clitoris with partial or total excision of the labia minora.

FGM Type 3 Infibulation – removal of the clitoris and labia minora with narrowing by stitching of the vaginal opening.

FGM Type 4 All other types of harmful traditional practices that mutilate the female genitalia, including cutting, incising, scraping and cauterisation.

Health implications

The procedure is often carried out without anaesthetic, usually by a woman with no formal medical training using a knife or razor.

Short term implications include: severe pain and shock, broken limbs (from being held down), infection, increased risk of blood borne viruses including HIV, Hepatitis B and C, urine retention, injury to adjacent tissues and immediate fatal haemorrhaging.

Long term risks include: kidney, urinary and vaginal infection, sexual dysfunction and problems giving birth as well as psychological trauma. Because of its illegality, many women and girls who develop health problems avoid hospitals and doctors, seeking help from 'healers' or back-street clinics. An estimated 10% of victims die from short term effects and 25% from recurrent problems.

The warning signs

Girls and women from practising FGM communities talking about holidays where they will 'become a woman' or 'become just like my mum and sister'.

If women in the family have already undergone FGM then there is an increased risk to other girls in the family.

Girls who have had the procedure performed will often avoid exercise on their return to school, ask to go to the toilet more often, find it hard to sit still for long periods or may have further time off school due to problems related to the procedure.

It's essential that teachers, doctors and other professionals learn the warning signs that a girl might be at risk.

What to do if you are worried someone may be at risk?

Advise them to talk to someone they trust, maybe a teacher or a school nurse. They are here to help and protect people.

Remember that no-one is allowed to physically or emotionally hurt people and FGM is not allowed in this country.

What can you do?

If you are concerned that a girl is at risk of FGM, this must be shared with your local Safeguarding Children's Team or the police without delay.

There is a Greater Manchester FGM forum for professionals working or coming into contact with FGM.

The aim of the forum is to enable statutory and voluntary organisations to work together to raise awareness of FGM, identify women and girls at high risk and reduce incidents in Greater Manchester. To help achieve this, the forum have developed training for staff, set up new ways of working and publicised information. This leaflet is part of that ongoing work.

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Support for victims

BSCA FGM Project: A project to support women and girls from communities affected by FGM in Bolton. The support for survivors include weekly drop in services, one to one sessions, referrals to relevant agencies and counselling. Address:192 Deane Road, Bolton BL3 5DP ☎ 01204 399239 Email bolsomcom@hotmail.com or visit www.boltonbsca.com

Greater Manchester Police regard FGM as a form of domestic abuse and honour-based violence. They encourage people to report cases of FGM to prevent women from suffering from serious injury or harm. Police officers work within the community to raise awareness of the issues of FGM and the long term impact on women and the community. FGM is a criminal offence and the police will prosecute anybody committing offences under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003.

St Mary's Sexual Health Centre: For help, support and de-infibulation (reversal) surgery.
☎ 0161 276 6515 or visit www.stmaryscentre.org

NESTAC (New Steps for the African Community): Trains doctors, nurses and medical students at hospitals and universities across Greater Manchester to help women who have undergone female circumcision. They are also setting up emotional support groups in Rochdale, Salford and North Manchester and run youth groups to educate teenagers on the health risks.
☎ 01706 868993 or mobile ☎ 07862 279289

Saheli Asian Women's Project: Provides advice, information and support services to Asian women and their children fleeing domestic abuse and/or forced marriages. The project gives Asian women a chance to get away from violent domestic situations by providing an environment which is safe, culturally familiar and which helps them come to a decision of their own. It can be either a one-off reconciliation, or coming to terms with being a single parent and living independently. All staff can speak English, Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi.
☎ 0161 945 4187
Email: sahelilttd@btconnect.com
www.saheli.org.uk

Forward: A foundation for women's health, research and development for African women and girls.

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) 24 hour hotline ☎ 0800 1111
☎ 020 8960 4000 or visit www.forward.org.uk

Victim Support ☎ 0845 456 88 00