

FGM (Female Genital Mutilation)

A crime against women

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a crime in this country. It is also a crime to take a British national or permanent resident abroad for FGM or to help someone trying to do this. Girls may be taken to their countries of origin so that FGM can be carried out during the summer holidays, allowing them time to 'heal' before they return to school. There are also worries that some girls may have FGM performed in the UK.

There are no health benefits to FGM. Removing and damaging healthy and normal female genital tissue interferes with the natural functions of girls' and women's bodies.

FGM procedures can cause:

- Severe bleeding.
- Infections.
- Problems with giving birth later in life - including the death of the baby.

FGM increases the risk of the vagina tearing during delivery, which causes damage and can lead to heavy bleeding. It can also increase the risk of the baby becoming distressed or dying during, or just after birth.

It may be difficult for women to talk about the issue, but it is important to tell someone that this has happened to you, or that you think it may happen to yourself or someone you know. If you are pregnant and have suffered FGM it is important to attend your antenatal classes and discuss this with your midwife. Surgery can be performed to open up the lower vagina. This is sometimes called 'reversal', although it cannot restore sensitive tissue that has been removed.

Advice and support

FGM is an extremely traumatic experience for girls and women, which stays with them for the rest of their lives.

Young women receiving psychological counselling report feelings of betrayal by parents, as well as regret and anger. If you are over 18 and a survivor of FGM, you can contact the Newham FGM Prevention Service for one-to-one support. The Newham FGM Prevention Service is part of the Newham One Stop Shop, which offers help and support to victims of domestic and sexual violence. If you would like to learn more about safeguarding girls or women from FGM, the service also offers safeguarding training and community workshops.

Preventing FGM

If you think a girl or woman is at risk of FGM

Tell us immediately using our online form or phone us on 020 3373 4600. If the child or young woman is at immediate risk call the police on **999**.

If the girl or woman has already been taken abroad, you should phone the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 020 7008 1500.

If you think you may be at risk of FGM

Under 18s

Phone our Children's Rights Service on 0800 01542 443.

Over 18s

Get advice and support from the Newham FGM Prevention Service website or by calling 0845 451 2547 (lines are open 24 hours a day).