

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Violence against women

According to the UN, violence against women is defined as: *'violence that is directed at a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately'*.

Violence against women is a human rights issue and public authorities have obligations to tackle domestic, sexual and other forms of violence against women under Article 2 (the right to life), Article 3 (the prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment) and Article 14 (the prohibition of discrimination) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In the UK violence against women includes: domestic violence, rape and sexual violence, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, crimes in the name of honour, trafficking and sexual exploitation. It also includes financial or psychological abuse 'that forms part of coercive and controlling behaviour'. It is mostly committed by men that women know or with whom they are in a close relationship.

Trade unions are vital in the struggle to end violence against women and girls. To raise the issue of violence against women, UCU branches could consider campaigning jointly with other trade unions on this issue as well as with the NUS as there will also be female students who are affected by domestic violence. UCU is a supporter of End Violence Against Women which is a coalition representing seven million individuals and organisations across the UK who believe we can and must create a world free from the threat and reality of violence against women.

As part of our work in this area, the following factsheet has been produced to highlight the serious and dangerous issue of female genital mutilation.

WARNING:

THE FOLLOWING MATERIAL IS DISTRESSING TO READ BUT AN UNDERSTANDING OF THIS PRACTICE IS VITAL TO PREVENTING AND IN TURN ENDING FGM. THIS FACTSHEET HAS BEEN PRODUCED AS PART OF OUR WIDER WORK AROUND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

What is it and who does it affect?

Female genital mutilation (FGM) or cutting is mostly carried out on young girls from infancy through to 15 years. The procedure comprises of the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It has absolutely no health benefits for girls and women and can cause major health problems including, infections especially as FGM is conducted without anaesthesia, infertility and complications in childbirth is common. It is said to affect an estimated 101 million girls aged 10 years and above in Africa have undergone FGM and about 140 million girls and women worldwide are currently living with the aftermath of FGM, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

FGM is a traditional practice and has no bearing with any religion, although, religion and the practice of FGM are often inter-twined.

It is practised for a myriad of reasons including ‘testing’ the purity of young girls and women, as well as a method for economic security (similar to a dowry). The young girl or woman has no say in whether she wants to undergo this procedure which is often planned without her knowledge and is sometimes seen as a rite of passage. The act of FGM is conducted by older (traditional) women who would have undergone themselves FGM or by medical practitioners – either way; this is a criminal practice that must be stopped as it is a clear violation of the human rights of girls (many who cannot speak for themselves) and women and is a clear act of violence against women and girls.

Types of FGM

Type I — Partial or total removal of the clitoris and/or the prepuce (clitoridectomy).

When it is important to distinguish between the major variations of Type I mutilation, the following subdivisions are proposed: **Type Ia**, removal of the clitoral hood or prepuce only; **Type Ib**, removal of the clitoris with the prepuce.

Type II — Partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora (excision).

When it is important to distinguish between the major variations that have been documented, the following subdivisions are proposed: **Type IIa**, removal of the labia minora only; **Type IIb**, partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora; **Type IIc**, partial or total removal of the clitoris, the labia minora and the labia majora. Note also that, in French, the term ‘excision’ is often used as a general term covering all types of female genital mutilation.

Type III — Narrowing of the vaginal orifice with creation of a covering seal by cutting and appositioning the labia minora and/or the labia majora, with or without excision of the clitoris (infibulation).

Type IIIa, removal and apposition of the labia minora; **Type IIIb**, removal and apposition of the labia majora.

Type IV — All other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, for example: pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterization.

Health costs for young girls and women

Because the practice of FGM is primarily conducted in unsanitary environments and no remedial aftercare support, the young girl or woman will undoubtedly suffer severe health issues as a consequence. The following list outlines some of the impact FGM has physically, sexually and psychologically suffered by girls and young women.

Physical	Sexual	Psychological
Severe pain and shock (sometimes death)	Pain during intercourse	Stigma
Haemorrhage	Shame or embarrassment about intimacy	Anger and fear
Infection of the wound	Greater risk of HIV (because of cuts which bleed)	Anxiety
Urinary tract infection	Medical checks (e.g. smear tests) difficult	Depression
Abscesses and ulcers	Infertility	Lack of trust
Fever		Relationship difficulties or disorders
Septicaemia		Low self-esteem
Gangrene		Flashbacks

Legislation

FGM has been illegal in the UK since 1985 when it was brought into legislation with the introduction of **The Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985**. This was replaced by **The Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003**. To date, there have been no criminal prosecutions.

Helpline

In June 2013, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children launched a UK-wide Female Genital Mutilation Helpline. The service will be operated and staffed by specially trained child protection helpline counsellors who will be able to offer advice, information and assistance to members of the public and professionals. Referrals (as appropriate) will be made to statutory agencies and other services. The helpline can be contacted on **0800 028 3550** or via emails sent to fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk

The aim of this specialist helpline is to improve the safeguarding of children in the UK by increasing the detection and protection of children at risk or who have become victims of female genital mutilation. It will also facilitate, as necessary, the sharing of information with police and relevant agencies so that intelligence can be gathered and appropriate action taken against those who facilitate female genital mutilation against children. It will work in the same way as the main NSPCC helpline.

28 years from the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act and 10 years from the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 – the NSPCC instigates a dedicated helpline for the reporting of FGM. In less than three months from its launch, the helpline has referred 34 potential cases of the crime to the Metropolitan Police. There is much more that can be done.

Where to go for help and advice

End Violence Against Women (www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk) EVAW is a unique coalition of organisations and individuals campaigning to end all forms of violence against women.

Forward UK (www.forwarduk.org.uk) The Foundation for Women's Health, Research and Development (FORWARD) is the leading campaign and support charity providing help with FGM, including counselling, referrals, information, materials and training.

FGM National Clinical Group (www.fgmnationalgroup.org) UK-based charity dedicated to working with women who have been affected by FGM and other related difficulties.

Women's Resource Centre (www.wrc.org.uk) Charity supporting women organisations to be more effective and sustainable.

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION IS A CRIMINAL OFFENCE

IT IS AN ACT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN