

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION



Information Services & Support Guide

For young people in the UK



Contents

Acknowledgements	3
About FORWARD	4
What is female genital mutilation?	6
Who is at risk of FGM?	7
What's religion got to do with FGM?	11
What are some of the myths about FGM?	12
What are the health effects of FGM?	13
Where can you find specialist FGM services?	14
What can you do if you are worried that someone is at risk of FGM?	16
What will happen when you report FGM to professionals?	17
Support Services	18
Other FGM support organisations	19
Additional Contacts	20
Glossary and Abbreviations	22

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The Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development (FORWARD)

Tel: 020 8960 4000

Fax: 020 8960 4014

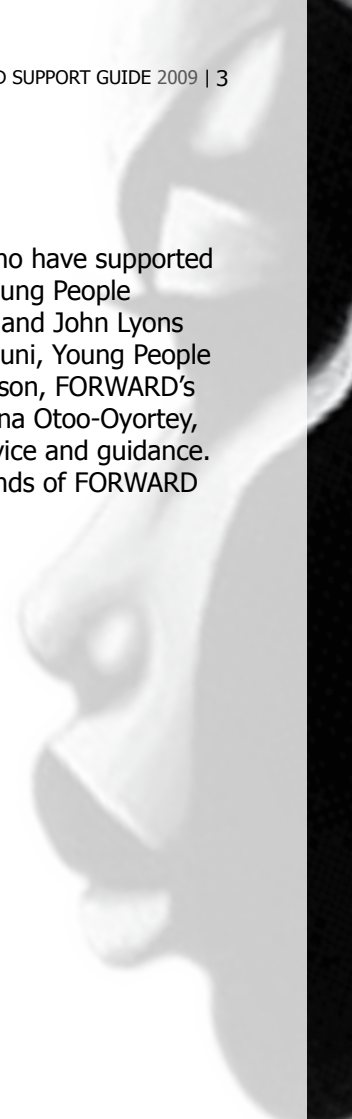
Email: forward@forwarduk.org.uk

www.forwarduk.org.uk

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Photo Credit: Painting by Gabrielle Pool

www.gabriellepool.com



About FORWARD

FORWARD is a campaign and support organisation for promoting and safeguarding the health and rights of African girls and women. We are a voluntary organisation, founded in 1985, and operate mainly in the UK and Africa. We focus on tackling female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced and child marriage. Our main programme areas include policy work; training and information services; research; and community engagement.

Young People Speak Out

Young People Speak Out is a programme within the FORWARD Youth Department. It trains young people from black and minority ethnic communities to become campaigners and peer-educators against all forms of domestic and sexual violence, including FGM. The programme provides a safe space for young women and men aged 16-24 years, to express their ideas, gain skills and develop ways for supporting themselves and those at risk. The programme uses youth-friendly and culturally sensitive methods including participatory training, workshops, film screenings and creative events.

For more information about this programme please contact the Youth Programme Coordinator on 020 8960 4000 or email: forward@forwarduk.org.uk

Purpose of the ISS Guide for Young People

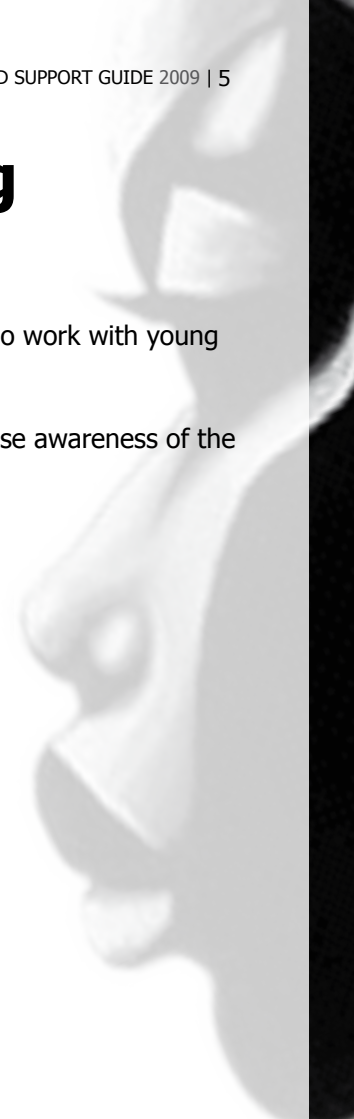
This guide has been developed as a resource for use in schools by young people and adults who work with young people. It targets young people between 12 and 18 years old.

Part 1 provides basic information on FGM and related health and social issues. It aims to increase awareness of the law and about child protection issues, and ideas for helping girls at risk of FGM.

Part 2 provides information for those who require specialist health and support services.

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Safeguarding rights & dignity



What is female genital mutilation?

Female genital mutilation, or FGM as it is commonly called, is a cultural practice that involves the removal of a girl's external genitals. FGM can take place when the girl is still a baby, during childhood, adolescence or at the time of marriage. FGM is sometimes called female genital cutting (FGC) or female circumcision (FC), although it bears no resemblance to male circumcision.

There are different types of FGM, based on the extent of the cut made. This may be mild or very severe and the type may depend on the community's tradition.

Type 1 is where the clitoris or the clitoral hood is cut off

Type 2 is where the clitoris and inner lips are removed

There are 4 types of FGM

Type 3 is where the clitoris, inner lips, and outer lips are cut away and the remaining skin is sewn or sealed, leaving only a small opening (infibulation)

Type 4 is all other harmful procedures, for example pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and burning

Who is at risk of FGM?

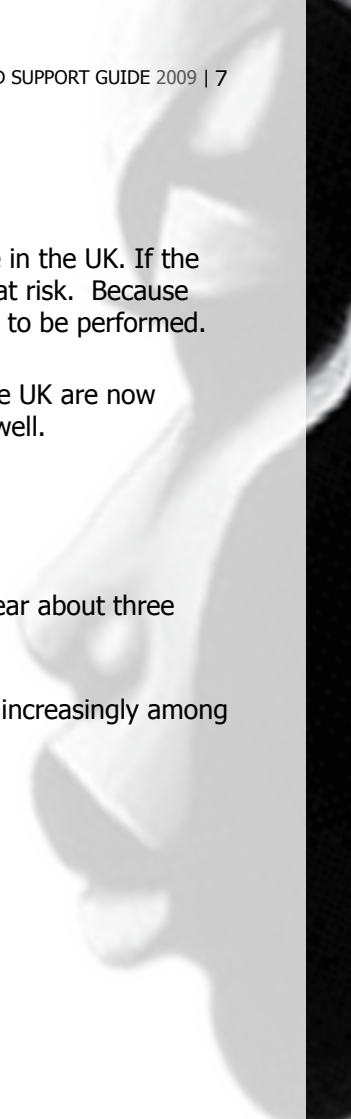
Some girls who come from FGM-practising communities may be at risk of FGM, even if they live in the UK. If the mother or older sisters have already undergone FGM then it is possible that the younger girl is at risk. Because FGM is illegal in the UK, girls may be taken abroad, especially during summer holidays, for FGM to be performed.

Not all girls from FGM-practising countries have undergone FGM. Many communities living in the UK are now stopping FGM. There is growing awareness about stopping FGM in many countries in Africa as well.

Where is FGM practised?

Between 100 and 140 million African women and girls have undergone FGM worldwide. Each year about three million girls are at risk of FGM in Africa alone.

FGM is practised in 28 African countries, in some communities in the Middle East and Asia, and increasingly among migrant communities in Europe, New Zealand, Australia, the United States, and Canada.





Source: World Health Organisation

What is the origin of FGM?

FGM is a traditional practice that dates back to before Christianity and Islam. Nobody knows the real origins of FGM. Some people say that it began in the days of the Pharaohs in ancient Egypt. What we know today is that FGM is a traditional practice that causes a lot of harm, and is not necessary.

FGM was once practised in the UK. A form of FGM was performed on women in England until the 19th century. It was considered a good way of preventing women from sleeping around. Some doctors even used the mild form of FGM to try to cure women of lesbianism.

FGM in the UK

Currently, it is estimated that over 24,000 girls aged under 16 years could be at risk of FGM in England and Wales. However, the exact numbers of girls and women affected by FGM is not known, because this information is not collected and it is difficult to obtain.

Why is FGM practised?

Many reasons have been given for the practice of FGM in the UK, and FGM can be done for any of these reasons:

- promoting cultural identity
- protecting tradition and religion
- maintaining a girl's virginity and honour
- improving a girl's marriage prospects

Families think FGM is in the girl's interests.

Many girls are brought up not to see FGM as wrong.

The Law – FGM Act 2003

Practising FGM is a criminal offence in the UK. The Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 makes it illegal to help, support or arrange for FGM to be performed on a girl in this country. It also forbids taking a girl outside the UK to have FGM.

The offence can result in 14 years in prison or a fine – or both.

Who is protected by the FGM law?

The FGM law protects girls and women who are either British nationals or UK permanent residents.

ALL girls, however, no matter their immigration status, are protected from FGM and all other forms of child abuse through the UK Child Protection laws.

Local Authorities may use their powers under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 if they believe that any child is at risk of, or has already undergone FGM. Local Authorities can also prevent a girl from being taken abroad for FGM if they consider the child to be at risk.

FGM is a human rights violation and can harm girls and women. Additionally, FGM can affect the education of girls and ultimately impair their health, development and well-being.

What's religion got to do with FGM?

Some people think FGM is an important part of their religion. There is no evidence to suggest that FGM is required by Islam, Christianity, Judaism or any other religion.

Islamic scholars around the world have condemned the practice of FGM and are clear that FGM is not an Islamic requirement. Islamic scholars and clerics have stressed that Islam forbids people from inflicting harm on others, and that those putting their daughters through FGM, or carrying out or aiding FGM, are going against the teachings of Islam.

FGM is not only practised by Muslims but is also common among Christians, particularly Coptic Christians in Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia. There is no evidence in the Bible to suggest that FGM is required by Christianity.

FGM also takes place among some Bedouin Jews and Falashas (Ethiopian Jews). Although Judaism considers circumcision essential for males, it does not require the practice for females.

"FGM is a harmful practice and a clear case of child abuse. It is a form of reverse racism not to protect these girls from barbaric practices that take from them for a lifetime their God-given right to an intact natural body."

Dr Yunes Teinaz,
Islamic Cultural Centre

What are some of the myths about FGM?

FGM-practising communities, there are myths that support the practice and tend to influence people's attitudes about FGM. Here are ways to respond to these myths:

Myth	Fact
An uncut woman will become promiscuous and have an insatiable sexual appetite.	FGM makes no difference to a woman's sexual appetite but stops her from enjoying sex.
If the clitoris is not cut, it will continue to grow.	The clitoris stops growing after puberty and is still small at the final stage of growth.
If the clitoris is not cut, it will harm her husband during intercourse.	The clitoris gives a woman pleasure and does not cause any harm to her or her husband.
If the clitoris is not cut, it will harm the baby during delivery.	The clitoris causes no harm to the foetus, the child or the mother, whereas FGM may cause serious complications during childbirth.
If a woman does not undergo FGM, she will become infertile.	FGM has nothing to do with fertility; and FGM may cause infertility through infections.
If a woman does not undergo FGM, her genitals will smell.	FGM will not make the vagina any more hygienic. In fact, Type 3 FGM can make the vagina less hygienic.

What are the health effects of FGM?

FGM is traditionally carried out by older women who are often not medically trained. FGM is also now being practised by trained medical personnel including midwives, nurses or doctors. No matter the method or who performs it, the practice still has serious health consequences.

FGM can result in pain, and in health and emotional problems. These can be short-term or long-term. Examples of health problems include:

- severe loss of blood
- severe pain or shock
- difficulties in passing urine
- difficulties during menstruation
- urinary tract infections
- increased risk of HIV infection
- complications in pregnancy or childbirth
- problems during sex; problems with sexuality
- mental health problems

Not all girls and women who have undergone FGM experience health problems. Others may not be aware of these problems, or may not perceive them to be unusual or related to FGM, especially if they occur many years after the procedure.

In the same way, not all health practitioners may link these health problems to FGM, especially if they do not know that the patient has undergone FGM.

So it is very important that you tell your nurse or GP if you are having any problems, infections or pain, so that you can get help and support.

Where can you find specialist FGM services?

Girls and women who have had FGM and experience health complications can access specialist health services that meet their specific needs. In the UK, health providers are increasingly becoming aware of FGM.

GP

Your GP, or health care professional, such as a midwife or health visitor, is there to help with any health issues associated with FGM. Make an appointment with them if you need any health advice.

Specialist FGM health clinics

Some hospitals and clinics also provide specialist FGM services in their African Well Women Clinics (AWWC). These free specialist services provide a wide range of medical support, advice and information to any girl or woman who has undergone FGM.

They have health care experts, including:

- specialist nurses
- midwives
- consultants
- counsellors

Staff at the specialist clinics have extensive experience in dealing with FGM and understand the cultural reasons behind the practice. They are not there to judge you, but are there to help. Some specialist clinics are able to provide a simple operation called de-infibulation. This opens up the closed form of Type 3 FGM and helps to restore the normal vaginal opening.

Remember, you do not need a referral from your GP to benefit from the services available at specialist clinics. You can visit them whenever it is convenient for you.

"I sometimes find coping with FGM difficult and found it hard to talk to my mother about the health difficulties and pain I was experiencing. Nevertheless, after getting de-infibulated in London, I have found that I have become a stronger and more confident person."

Salimata



What can you do if you are worried that someone is at risk of FGM?

If you are worried that you, your friend, or your sister is at risk of FGM here in the UK or of being taken abroad for FGM, it is very important that you do something to stop FGM from taking place.

No one should be forced to undergo FGM. Sometimes the warning signs are only rumours, but it may be worth telling someone to be on the safe side.

Take immediate action: You can get help and advice. Do not stay silent.

- Talk to a trusted adult about the situation – a teacher, school nurse or close relative
- Call the contact numbers at the back of this information guide
- Contact Children and Young People's Services at your local council
- Speak to the Police Child Protection Team
- If the girl is at immediate risk, call the police on 999
- If you are abroad you can still contact the nearest British Consulate, Embassy, or High Commission for help.

"I had a friend who was circumcised at a much older age, she was about 13 years and it was strange for her as she was aware of what was going on although she made them believe that she didn't understand. She was forced to go to the room and got bombarded by 4 women who pinned her down to the floor. This happened to her when she went on holiday, they cut her with no sewing".

UK young woman

What will happen when you report FGM to professionals?

If you tell a teacher or school nurse about your concerns that someone is at risk of FGM this will be treated confidentially. This case will be referred for specialist care or to the child protection officer in the school.

- You will be trusted, listened to and taken seriously
- You may be asked more detailed questions
- The teacher will not usually make any assumptions
- This will be dealt with in confidence

Most professionals will treat any reported case of FGM as a child protection issue and start a child protection referral. This means that Children's Services will treat this as a serious concern and organise a meeting to assess the case. This investigation will also try to find out if other siblings in the family are at risk. Parents will be part of this meeting to discuss the concern.

A girl will not automatically be taken away from her home. It will ONLY happen in rare cases when the parents fail to guarantee that they will not cut their daughter. Many professionals will be involved in a child protection case. They include teachers, nurses, children's services, the police and voluntary organisations. They all have a duty to help stop FGM in the UK.

"I didn't want to talk about it [FGM]... but when I found out the information I found more confidence to go out there and tell people. You can't be shy about it because you know you're stopping a bad thing and you might save your little sister. If I know the information I'm more confident to speak out."

Young Somali male

Support services

Acton African Well Women Centre, Mill Hill Surgery	Acton, West London	020 8383 8761
African Women's Clinic, University College Hospital	Central London	0845 155 5000 ext: 2531, or 020 7387 9300
African Well Women's Clinic, Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital	South London	020 7188 6872
African Well Women's Clinic, Northwick Park and St Mark's Hospital,	Middlesex	020 8869 2870
African Well Women's Clinic, Whittington Hospital	North London	020 7288 3482 ext: 3482 / 3483
St. Mary's Hospital, Gynaecology Department	Central London	020 7886 6691
African Well Women's Clinic, Central Middlesex Hospital	North-west London	020 8963 7177
Women's and Young People's Services, Sylvia Pankhurst Health Centre, Mile End Hospital	East London	020 7377 7898 / 020 7377 7870
African Well Women's Service, Oliver Road Medical Centre	Leyton, East London	020 8430 7382 / 020 8430 7381
Liverpool Women's Hospital	Liverpool	0151 702 4085
Minority Ethnic Women's and Girls Clinic, Charlotte Keel Health Centre	Bristol	0117 902 7111
Birmingham Heartlands Hospital	Birmingham	0121 424 0730

Other FGM support organisations

ACCM (Agency for Culture and Change Management)	Sheffield	www.accmsheffield.org
AFRUCA (Africans United Against Child Abuse)	London	www.afruca.org
Black Women's Health and Family Support	London	www.bwhafs.com
Eritrean Health Support Association	London	020 7419 1972
FORWARD (Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development)	London	www.forwarduk.org.uk
Waltham Forest Somali Women's Association	London	020 8503 7121
Somali Welfare Association	London	020 8968 1195

Additional Contacts

Women's Aid – National charity working to end domestic violence against women and children. Provides domestic abuse directory and national helpline.

www.womensaid.org.uk

National Domestic Violence Helpline: 0808 2000 247 (24-hour free helpline)

NSPCC – National charity working in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children.

www.nspcc.org.uk

Childline (www.childline.org.uk): 0800 1111 (24-hour free helpline for children)

Child Protection Helpline: 0808 800 5000 (advice for adults worried about a child)

fpa – The UK's leading sexual health charity.

www.fpa.org.uk

fpa Helpline: 0845 122 8690 (Mon-Fri, 9-6)

Crimestoppers – Can be contacted anonymously with information about crime.

0800 555 111

Rights of Women – National charity working to attain justice and equality by informing, educating and empowering women about their legal rights.

www.rightsofwomen.org.uk

Legal Advice Line: 020 7251 6577 (Tues/Wed/Thurs, 2-4pm/7-9pm; Fri 12-2)

Sexual Violence Legal Advice line: 020 7251 8887 (Mon, 11-1; Tues 10-12)

Southall Black Sisters – A resource centre in West London offering a service to women experiencing violence and abuse.

www.southallblacksisters.org.uk

020 8571 9595 (Mon-Fri, 10-5pm)

Brook – Free and confidential sexual health advice and contraception for young people up to the age of 25.

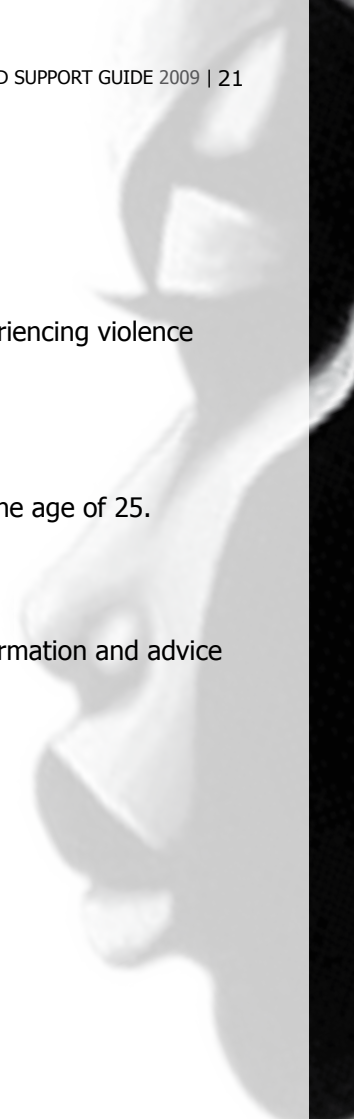
www.brook.org.uk

Brook Helpline: 0800 0185 023 (Mon-Fri, 9-5)

Marie Stopes International – leading expert on abortion in the UK. It provides live chat information and advice on its website.

www.mariestopes.org.uk

Abortion information 0845 300 8090 (24-hr)



Glossary and Abbreviations

Traditional terms for FGM:

Language	Term used for FGM
Amharic	Megrez
Arabic	Khifad Khitan Tahoor Thara
Harrari	Absum
Igbo	Ibi Ugwu
Kriolu	Fanadu di Mindjer
Limba	Bondo
Mandingo	Sunna Bondo

Language	Term used for FGM
Mandinka	Kuyango
Musolula	Karoola Niaka
Mendee	Bondo Sonde
Somali	Gudiniin Halalays Qodiin
Soussou	Sunna
Swahili	Kutairi Kutairi was ichana
Temenece	Bondo
Tigregna	Mekhnishab

Other FGM-related terms and definitions:

FGM: Female genital mutilation; **FC:** Female circumcision; **FGC:** Female genital cutting

Female genital mutilation is the removal of a girl's external genital for non-medical reasons.

Clitoridectomy	excision of the clitoris
Excision	removal of the clitoral hood, with or without removal of part or all of the clitoris
Infibulation	(also known as pharaonic circumcision): Type 3 FGM, the most extensive form of FGM
De-infibulation	(also known as defibulation or FGM reversal): the surgical procedure to open up the closed vagina of Type 3 FGM
Re-infibulation	(also known as re-suturing): the re-stitching of Type 3 FGM to re-close the vagina after childbirth (illegal in the UK)
Sunna:	the traditional name for a form of FGM that involves the removal of the prepuce of the clitoris only. The word ' <i>Sunna</i> ' refers to the 'ways or customs' of the prophet Mohammad, considered (wrongly in the case of FGM) to be religious obligations. However, the term ' <i>sunna</i> ' is often used in FGM-practising communities to refer to all forms of FGM.

She can't stop them
from mutilating her body

But we can protect our
daughters & sisters

SAY NO TO FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

For confidential help and advice
Telephone FORWARD on:
020 8960 4000
www.forwarduk.org.uk

Metropolitan Police Service
Child Abuse Investigation Command
Project Azure Information Line:
020 7161 2888

You can call Crimestoppers
anonymously on
0800 555 111
Crimestoppers is an independent charity

Female Genital Mutilation is child abuse and a grave
human rights violation which can have serious health and
psychological consequences.

Over 20,000 girls and young women under 15 are at risk
of Female Genital Mutilation in the UK.

It is illegal to practice Female Genital Mutilation in the UK.

It is illegal to take girls abroad from the UK for Female
Genital Mutilation whether or not it is lawful elsewhere.

There is a 14 year prison sentence for anyone performing,
arranging or assisting Female Genital Mutilation.

F→RWARD
Safeguarding rights & dignity

**Foundation for Women's Health,
Research and Development**

Tel: +44 (0)20 8960 4000
Fax: +44 (0)20 8960 4014
Email: forward@forwarduk.org.uk
Web: www.forwarduk.org.uk

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Company Number: 01921508

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