

## Female Genital Mutilation ('FGM')

DATE: 1<sup>st</sup> APRIL 2009

On **26<sup>th</sup> March 2009** a roadshow took place in Luton primarily focusing on female genital mutilation ('FGM'). The Government has recently stated its commitment to tackling FGM in the UK and acknowledged that more needs to be done to raise awareness of this cruel practice and the issues surrounding it.

### The UK

The Metropolitan Police states that at any one time over 20,000 girls in the UK are at risk of FGM. In 2008 there were 50 reported cases of FGM. So far in 2009 seven cases have been reported to the police. It is not uncommon for girls to be taken out of the UK to suffer FGM

### What is FGM ?

The World Health Organisation defines FGM as all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons. It is conducted on girls aged usually between 4 to 14 years. In some cases it is conducted on newborn baby girls. Older women with no medical training in surgical practices usually carry out FGM. Anaesthetics and antiseptics are not generally used. The girl is often held down by relatives to prevent her from struggling.

**WHO** estimate that 138 million girls and women have been subjected to FGM. It is practiced in many parts of Africa and Europe as well as in the ethnic minority populations of Australia, New Zealand, the United States of America and Canada.

**FGM** is a tradition that has been passed down through female generations in the FGM practising communities. It is considered a cultural issue and is often not discussed between women.

Depending on the degree of mutilation FGM can have a number of short and long term health implications. Victims suffer severe pain and shock; uterine; vaginal and pelvic infections leading to extensive damage of the reproductive system; complications in pregnancy and child birth; cysts and neuromas to name but a few serious medical consequences.

### The UK Law

In the UK FGM is illegal under the FGM Act 2003 and under the Children Act 1998. It is also a violation of human rights. **It is a form of child abuse.**

Under the FGM Act 2003

- **It is illegal to conduct FGM on a UK national or resident**
- **It is illegal to arrange or assist FGM on a UK national or resident which includes girls being taken out of the country for this**
- **The maximum penalty which can be imposed is 14 years imprisonment.**

There have been no prosecutions since the Act was introduced.

## Continued

If you have any concerns that FGM is about to take place on any child you should contact your local police station or you can call Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111

### Civil Remedies

FGM is child abuse. It is possible for victims of FGM to claim compensation from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority for the injuries they have suffered. However, in order that they may do so, the injuries must be reported to the police. The relevant tariffs are £5,000 and £11,000 depending on the severity of the injury.

The following is a quote from Waris Dirie, a former supermodel from Somalia who underwent FGM when she was a child. Waris is now UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador and spokesperson for FGM:

*"Mama tied a blindfold over my eyes. The next thing I felt my flesh was being cut away. I heard the blade sawing back and forth through my skin. The pain between my legs was so intense I wished I would die"*

Please contact Sue Michael or Jackie Morton on 0845 263 7511 if you wish to seek advice about legal options available if you are concerned about a child who has been, or you suspect is about to be subjected to FGM.

[see Pictons dedicated Child Abuse page here](#)

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