



Female Genital Mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation is defined as 'all procedures involving partial or total removal of the female external genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs, whether for cultural or non-therapeutic reasons'.

(World Health Organisation 1996)

The UK has a long history of immigration from former colonial countries. Individuals from practising communities have settled in the UK for numerous reasons e.g. to increase employment or education prospects. More recently, there are those Africans who have come to seek asylum and refugee status due to civil unrest and war. This wide range of social and economic backgrounds of women cannot be overlooked.

In the UK, FGM practising groups are mainly from Kenya, Somalia, Egypt, Eritrea, Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Ethiopia and Sudan. Although a greater density of practising communities live in London areas, we cannot ignore or dismiss this as a non-issue elsewhere, as due to the government dispersal scheme, refugee/asylum seekers can be transferred anywhere in the country. This means FGM is an issue UK wide.

Risks/Signs

A child may be considered at risk if:

- She comes from a community/culture that practises FGM.
- Her mother or older girls in the family have undergone FGM.
- The family hold a positive attitude towards FGM, view FGM as a beneficial tradition worthy of upholding.
- She is isolated.
- Her grandmother is present or has great influence in the family.
- No one has ever raised the issue of FGM with the child/family or provided accessible/age specific information.
- A girl makes reference to FGM in a conversation or exhibits fear/excitement related to the issue. She may verbally request help to prevent it happening.
- You receive word that a family intends to take their child(ren) to their country of origin for a significant time period or to familiarise them with local traditions, especially if the child falls within the age at which FGM traditionally occurs in that country.
- A child refers to going away for other reasons e.g. 'My mother says I am going home for a holiday to stay with my grandmother and I will come back a woman'. 'I am going on holiday and will come back with a sore bottom'.
- Similarly a child who refers to a female relative visiting for a special ceremony.