

WEST LOTHIAN CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE

FGM BRIEFING 2024

Female genital mutilation is a
violation
of human
rights



World Health
Organization

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM) IS ABUSE AND A CHILD PROTECTION ISSUE

Before the long school holiday, when families may be taking trips abroad to visit extended family, it is worth reminding ourselves of the harm caused by FGM and the need to be alert to the risks.

FGM is the removal of part or all of the external female genitalia and/or injury to the female genital organs for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons.

It is also known as cutting, and sometimes referred to as female circumcision, or as a girl 'having her bath'.

FGM has no health benefits and is not supported by any religion.

FGM is child abuse. This traditional practice is an extreme form of gender-based abuse, causing significant and lifelong physical and emotional harm.

FGM is a crime in Scotland: It is against the law to carry out FGM, assist or arrange FGM for a child in Scotland or take a girl abroad for FGM (Prohibition of FGM (Scotland) Act 2005).

- FGM is practiced in the western, eastern, and north-eastern regions of Africa, and some countries in the Middle East and Asia
- More than 230 million girls and women alive today have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM) in 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia where FGM is practiced.
- FGM is mostly carried out on young girls between infancy and age 15.
- FGM is a violation of the human rights of girls and women.¹

Cultural and social factors for performing FGM

The reasons why FGM is performed vary from one region to another and include a mix of sociocultural factors within families and communities.

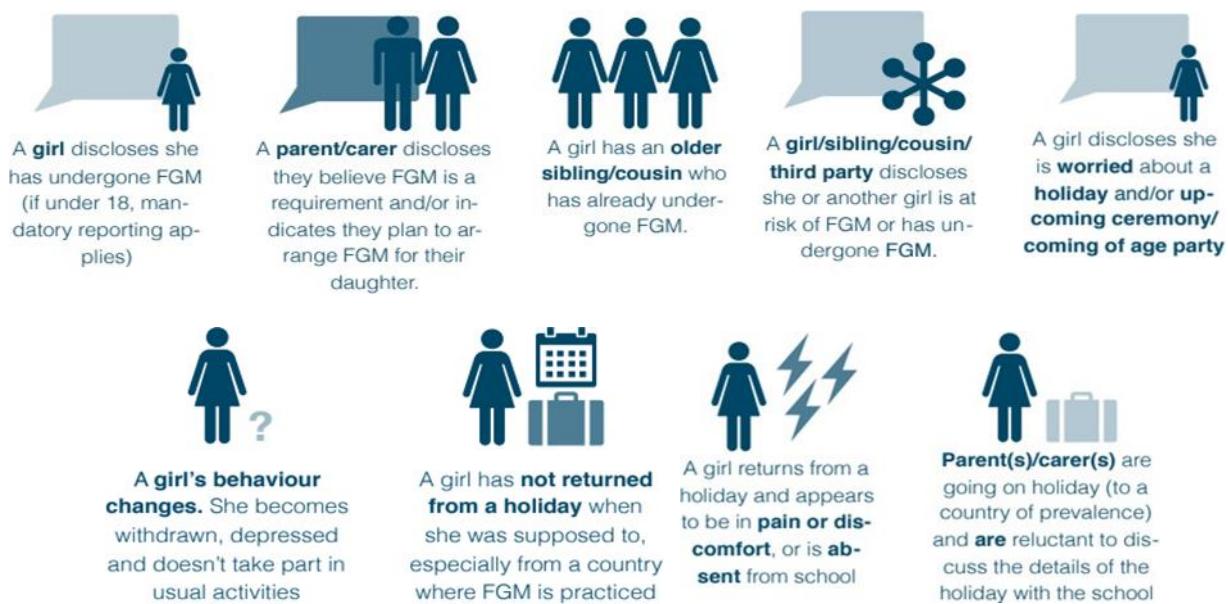
- Where FGM is a social convention (social norm), the social pressure to conform to what others do and have been doing, as well as the need to be accepted socially and the fear of being rejected by the community, are strong motivations to perpetuate the practice.
- FGM is often considered a necessary part of raising a girl, and a way to prepare her for adulthood and marriage. This can include controlling her sexuality to promote premarital virginity and marital fidelity.
- Some people believe that the practice has religious support, although no religious scripts prescribe the practice.

The Gambia

The Gambia is of particular concern this year - a law to ban FGM was introduced in 2015. However, politicians and influential leaders are trying to overturn the ban and change the law. Parents and carers from the Gambia or other West African countries may be influenced in their views on FGM by their families, friends or other community leaders in the UK. Families returning to West Africa for a holiday or extended stay, may face undue pressure or coercion which may place the girls in their care at great risk. FGM can be performed in secret and often against parents' wishes.

¹ WHO February 2024

Indicators of FGM



Immediate complications can include:

- severe pain
- excessive bleeding (haemorrhage)
- genital tissue swelling
- fever
- infections e.g. tetanus
- urinary problems
- wound healing problems
- injury to surrounding genital tissue
- shock
- death

Long-term complications can include:

- urinary problems (painful urination, urinary tract infections);
- vaginal problems (discharge, itching, bacterial vaginosis and other infections);
- menstrual problems;
- scar tissue and keloid;
- sexual problems (pain during intercourse, decreased satisfaction);
- increased risk of childbirth complications;
- need for later surgeries; and
- psychological problems.

What should you do?

If, after speaking to parents/carers and/or girls you are concerned that a girl is at risk of, or has suffered FGM [Edinburgh and the Lothians Multi-agency Child Protection Procedures](#) must be followed and a child protection referral made to one of the core agencies.

If travel is imminent, a referral must be made without delay.

See also: [Edinburgh & the Lothians Inter-agency FGM Procedures](#)