



## Briefing: Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting

This briefing is one of a series by VAW Prevention Scotland which aim to highlight the key research and resources on a particular VAW issue. They aim to provide practitioners with a starting point when researching the subject. There are many more resources in the resource directory on our website (<http://www.vawpreventionscotland.org.uk/resources/general>) and sources of further resources are listed at the end of this briefing. Please contact us with suggestions for updates and for resources to add to our directory.

### Summary

Female genital mutilation/cutting is a harmful traditional practice that reflects deep-rooted gender inequality and represents a societies control over women.<sup>1</sup> Within these cultures it is believed that the female genital mutilation preserves a woman's virginity; ensures marital fidelity and prevents sexual behaviour that is considered deviant. It is also seen as a practice that makes girls "clean" and beautiful; removes parts of the genitalia perceived as "masculine", such as the clitoris.<sup>2</sup> Female genital mutilation is an extreme form of violence against women.

The World Health Organisation defines female genital mutilation as; "...all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons"<sup>3</sup> this can range from partial or total removal of the clitoris; partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia; narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal; and all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non medical purposes.<sup>4</sup> Mostly carried out among young girls between infancy and 15 years old, it is an extremely harmful practice causing bleeding, pain and trauma.<sup>5</sup> The range of long term consequences include chronic pain, infections, decreased sexual enjoyment and psychological consequences, such as post traumatic stress disorder<sup>6</sup>. Female genital mutilation can also cause childbirth complications and newborn deaths<sup>7</sup>.

Globally widespread, it is a predominant in Africa, Asia and the Middle East and, to a lesser extent, within some immigrant communities in Europe, North America and Australasia. Many countries, including the UK, having signed up to international conventions on female genital mutilation<sup>8</sup> are obliged to take legal action against it.<sup>9</sup>

### Working Towards Primary Prevention in Scotland

Due to recent migration trends and the growth of Black and Ethnic Minorities communities within areas of Scotland, there is a need to raise awareness of female genital mutilation in order to work toward preventing and eliminating FGM. This briefing provides a collection of resources intended to assist in working toward primary prevention of FGM.



### **Key Statistics**

74,000 women in the UK have undergone FGM and a further 7000 under the age of 17 are at risk.<sup>10</sup>

It was estimated that female genital mutilation would be inflicted on up to 2,000 British Schoolgirls during the summer holiday 2010.<sup>11</sup>

500,00 girls and women living in Europe are suffering with the lifelong consequences of female genital mutilation.<sup>12</sup>

Between 100 million and 140 million girls and women worldwide are currently living with the consequences of FGM.<sup>13</sup>

3 million girls and women are subjected to female genital mutilation each year; on average 8000 girls per day.<sup>14</sup>

### **Quotes**

*'The women grabbed my arms and forcefully pushed me on to the ground, stripped me naked, held my legs wide open and cut my clitoris with unsterilized kitchen knife; Blood scattered everywhere. I was screaming at the top of my voice, shouting for my mother's help; The women gave me a liquid to drink made from herbs. They said it would stop the bleeding and relieve the pain. For days I was not able to walk upright. The psychological effect is unexplainable...'*<sup>15</sup>

#### **Young Woman Scotland: DARF, 2010**

*'FGM is much more common than most people realise, both worldwide and in the UK. Most of the women and girls affected live in Africa... However, those who have undergone, or are at risk of undergoing, FGM are increasingly found in Western Europe..., primarily among immigrant and refugee communities... from countries where FGM is endemic.'*

#### **Home Office, 2003**

*"The pain inflicted by FGM does not stop with the initial procedure, but often continues as ongoing torture throughout a woman's life"*<sup>16</sup>

#### **Manfred Nowak, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture**

*'Acts involving genital mutilation are infringements of the right to freedom from torture, inhuman and degrading treatment...'*<sup>17</sup>

#### **United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees, 1996**

*To succeed in abolishing the practice of FGM will demand fundamental attitudinal shifts in the way that society perceives the human rights of women.*

**Efua Dorkenoo 1994. Founder of FORWARD and author of *Cutting the Rose. Female Genital Mutilation: the Practice and Its Prevention.***



## **Key Resources**

### **Introductory Resources**

**Abandon the Knife: Documentary Film, Kenya 2011.**

<http://www.vawpreventionscotland.org.uk/resources/audio-visual-resources/documentary-abandon-knife>

This short documentary, produced by The Guardian and Christian Aid, shows how two young women, Nancy and Gertrude, defy local custom in refusing female circumcision and, in their fight, push for social change and women's emancipation.

**Female Genital Mutilation Fact Sheet WHO, 2010**

<http://www.vawpreventionscotland.org.uk/resources/education-resources-adults/female-genital-mutilation-fact-sheet>

Accessible and concise document which outlines the WHO's efforts to eliminate FGM through advocacy, research and guidance.

**END FGM European Campaign**

<http://www.vawpreventionscotland.org.uk/campaigns>

END FGM European Campaign is led by Amnesty International Ireland working with NGO's and EU member states. The campaign aims to put female genital mutilation high on the EU agenda and to echo the voices of women who have undergone FGM and those at risk of being subjected to it.

### **Resources for Local Authorities and Health Practitioners**

**West Lothian Female Genital Mutilation Protocol (May 2011)**

<http://www.vawpreventionscotland.org.uk/resources/government-strategypolicy/west-lothian-female-genital-mutilation-protocol>

A document detailing legislation and police procedures with regards to those at risk, or have undergone, FGM.

**Harmful Traditional Practices: what health workers need to know about gender based violence (2009)**

<http://www.vawpreventionscotland.org.uk/resources/government-strategypolicy/harmful-traditional-practices-what-health-workers-need-know-abou>

This gives key information about harmful traditional practices, including FGM, and outlines the role and responsibilities of health workers.



***Research Reports on Preventing Female Genital Mutilation***

**Researching Female Genital Mutilation Intervention Programmes Linked to African Communities in the EU (REPLACE) Toolkit (2011)**

<http://www.vawpreventionscotland.org.uk/node/2181>

REPLACE aimed to supplement and/or 'replace' existing approaches to the ending of FGM, with health behaviour approaches to end the traditional harmful practice on FGM in the EU.

***Global Insight on Prevention of Female Genital Mutilation***

FGM is a global issue; these reports give insight into what types of prevention measures and preventative action may be applicable to immigrant communities in Scotland.

**Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation: An interagency Statement (2008)**

<http://www.vawpreventionscotland.org.uk/resources/research-reports/eliminating-female-genital-mutilation-interagency-statement>

This statement documents evidence collected over the past decade about the practice. It summarises research on why it continues, how to stop it, and its damaging effects on the health of women girls and newborn babies.

**The Dynamics of Social Change: Towards the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Five African Countries (2010).**

<http://www.vawpreventionscotland.org.uk/resources/research-reports/dynamics-social-change-towards-abandonment-female-genital-mutilationcutti>

This report examines the social dynamics of the abandonment of female genital mutilation/cutting and seeks to inform policies and programmes aimed at ending the practice, both in countries where it is part of local tradition and among diaspora communities in countries of immigration.



### *Research into FGM*

#### **A Baseline Survey in Glasgow and Edinburgh on the Beliefs, Views and Experiences of FGM (2010)**

<http://www.vawpreventionscotland.org.uk/resources/research-reports/baseline-survey-glasgow-edinburgh-beliefs-views-experiences-fgm-2010>

Following this initial piece of research DARE recommend that more needs to be done to tackle FGM in Scotland as the lack of data on FGM makes it difficult for policy makers and professionals to respond effectively to the needs of affected women and to protect girls from undergoing FGM.

#### **Crimes of the Community: Honour Based Violence in the UK (2010)**

<http://www.vawpreventionscotland.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/crimes-community-honour-based-violence-uk>

A report aimed to examine the causes and extent of honour-based crimes in the UK today, which addresses female genital mutilation alongside, other harmful traditional practices.

#### **Listening to African Voices - Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting among Immigrants in Hamburg: Knowledge, Attitudes and Practice (2011)**

<http://www.vawpreventionscotland.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/listening-african-voices-female-genital-mutilationcutting-among-immig>

This research resulted in the reporters recommending that there be development and implementation of an action plan against FGM and that activities should focus mainly on preventative measures.



## ***Key contacts and sources of further information***

### **Scotland**

#### **Dignity Alert Research Forum (DARF)**

DARF works to end violence against women in Scotland and east Africa. The Current focus of this organization is to end female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. Notably, DARF is the only organisation in Scotland systematically focusing on ending FGM through multiple rights-based approaches especially creating awareness and trainings on FGM and related matters.

<http://www.darf.org.uk/>

#### **Amina, The Muslim Women's Resource Centre**

Amina, The Muslim Women's Resource Centre works with Muslim women and promotes the understanding of their needs in society. It does this by providing advice and support services to encourage, enable and empower Muslim women, and also by advising policy makers.

[www.mwrc.org.uk](http://www.mwrc.org.uk)

#### **Hemat Gryffe Women's Aid**

Based in Glasgow, Hemat Gryffe Women's Aid provide safe temporary refuge accommodation primarily to black and minority ethnic women, children and young people who are victims of domestic abuse.

[www.hematgryffe.org.uk](http://www.hematgryffe.org.uk)

#### **Shakti Women's Aid**

Based in Edinburgh, Shakti Women's Aid was established in 1968 and offers support, advocacy and information to all black/minority ethnic women, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse from partners/husbands, ex-partners and other family members.

[www.shaktiedinburgh.co.uk](http://www.shaktiedinburgh.co.uk)

### **UK**

#### **Forward UK: safeguarding rights and dignity**

FORWARD is the lead agency working to tackle FGM in the UK. We campaign for effective policies and resources to support women and girls affected by FGM and child marriage. FORWARD is a strong Diaspora voice in policy development, working through networks and strategic action in the UK, Europe and Africa.

<http://www.forwarduk.org.uk/>

#### **Southall Black Sisters**

Based in London, Southall Black sisters have campaigned on various issues affecting black/minority ethnic women and provide information and resources on FGM.

[http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk/campaign\\_forcedmarriage.html](http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk/campaign_forcedmarriage.html)



## Europe

### END FGM European Campaign

This campaign, led by Amnesty International, provides news and information on EU legislation and developments in FGM prevention.

<http://www.endfgm.eu/en/>

## International

### World Health Organisation

The World Health Organisation have conducted research and provided reports on FGM and provide information for media enquiry's on this issue.

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/>

### The United Nations Population Fund

Provides information in a joint programme launched in 2007 has produced several detailed reports focusing on global elimination of FGM.

<http://www.unfpa.org/gender/practices1.htm>

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<sup>1</sup> In cultures where it is widely practiced female genital mutilation has become an important part of the cultural identity of girls and women. See p 6 Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation: An interagency Statement (2008)

<sup>2</sup> See p 7-8 FGM Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation: An interagency Statement (2008)

<sup>3</sup> WHO 2010, See Factsheet no. 241, Female genital mutilation;  
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/> (accessed 27<sup>th</sup> July 2011)

<sup>4</sup> WHO 2010, See Factsheet no. 241, Female genital mutilation;  
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/> (accessed 27<sup>th</sup> July 2011)

<sup>5</sup> See p 11 FGM Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation: An interagency Statement. (2008)

<sup>6</sup> See Annex 5 of Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation: An interagency Statement (2008) for the main health risks and consequences.

<sup>7</sup> WHO 2010, See Factsheet no. 241, Female genital mutilation  
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/> (accessed 27<sup>th</sup> July 2011)

<sup>8</sup> The UK has signed to the following conventions and are thus obliged to take legal action against FGM; The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UK ratification 1991); The UN Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (1981).

<sup>9</sup> The Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (Scotland) was passed in 2005 making it an offence to take any part, whatsoever, in female genital mutilation, even if it is carried out over seas, and is punishable by 14 years imprisonment. In England and Wales the Female Genital Mutilation Act was passed in 2003. To date there have been no prosecutions in Scotland or the England and Wales under either acts. See House of Lords debate 30<sup>th</sup> June 2011: Female Genital Mutilation.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/110630-0001.htm#11063052000909>



(accessed on 26th July 2011).

<sup>10</sup> The Department of Health CMO estimates. Update 37, 2004; cited in Pio (2011) West Lothian Female Genital Mutilation Protocol.

<sup>11</sup> The Guardian 25<sup>th</sup> July 2010, British Schoolgirls undergo horror of genital mutilation despite tough laws; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/jul/25/female-circumcision-children-british-law> (accessed on 25th July 2011).

<sup>12</sup> The European Parliament estimates, see the Amnesty International END FGM European Campaign; <http://www.endfgm.eu/en/> (accessed on 25th July 2011).

<sup>13</sup> WHO 2010, See Factsheet no. 241, Female genital mutilation; <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/>

<sup>14</sup> Amnesty International END FGM European Campaign; <http://www.endfgm.eu/en/> (accessed on 25th July 2011).

<sup>15</sup> See the Dignity Alert Research Forum (DARF); <http://www.darf.org.uk/index.htm> (accessed on 25th July 2011)

<sup>16</sup> Manfred Nowak, UN Special Reporter on Torture as cited on Amnesty International END FGM European Campaign website; <http://www.endfgm.eu/en/> (accessed on 25th July 2011).

<sup>17</sup> UNHCR 1996, See the Dignity Alert Research Forum (DARF); <http://www.darf.org.uk/page5.htm> (accessed on 25th July 2011)