

NHSGGC staff briefing paper on Female Genital Mutilation

Background Information

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

FGM has been unlawful in Scotland since 1985. The Female Genital Mutilation (Scotland) Act 2005 re-enacted the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985 and extended protection by making it a criminal offence for UK residents to be involved in the planning or carrying out of FGM whether in Scotland or abroad. The Act also increased the penalty on conviction on indictment from 5 to 14 years' imprisonment.

It is included as a priority for action in Equally Safe, the Scottish Government's Strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls. The Scottish Government will shortly publish an action plan for aimed at the prevention and eradication of FGM and the improvement of support to survivors in Scotland. Multi-agency guidance is also expected to be issued around the end of 2015. NHSGGC has directly contributed to the development of the action plan.

From the limited data available¹, it is estimated that:

- there are approximately 24,000 men, women and children living in Scotland born in a country affected by FGM to some extent
- there are communities potentially affected by FGM living in every Scottish local authority area, with the largest being in Glasgow, Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Dundee respectively
- 2750 girls were born in Scotland to mothers born in an FGM-practising country between 2001-2012

What is FGM?

Female genital mutilation is classified into four types:

1. Clitoridectomy: partial or total removal of the clitoris (a small, sensitive and erectile part of the female genitals) and, in very rare cases, only the prepuce (the fold of skin surrounding the clitoris).
2. Excision: partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora (the labia are "the lips" that surround the vagina).
3. Infibulation: narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the inner, or outer, labia, with or without removal of the clitoris.
4. Other: all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, e.g. pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing the genital area.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is internationally recognised as a form of gender-based violence and a violation of the human rights of girls and women. The procedure has no health benefits for girls and women and can cause severe bleeding and problems urinating, and later cysts, infections, infertility as well as complications in childbirth and increased risk of newborn deaths. There can also be significant psychological and psychosexual impacts.

NHSGGC Response to FGM

For the past two years work has been underway within NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to strengthen services' identification of, and responses to, survivors of FGM and to protect children and young women at risk of FGM.

Following a scoping of responses in 2013 an NHSGGC FGM action plan is being deliveredⁱⁱ to address gaps and strengthen existing responses. The plan includes actions to improve assessment and care pathways, recording and reporting of disclosures and protection of individuals affected and is underpinned by a commitment to working with partners to prevent and eradicate FGM.

As a result an [FGM revision pathway](#) is now in place, including a pathway for self referral into this service. A maternity pathway is in the final stages of development. A Self Directed Learning Unit for midwives is currently being updated.

[Intercollegiate Guidance](#) on FGM is also available.

Workforce development and information resources

FGM is included in staff training on routine enquiry on GBV. A small number of staff have attended awareness raising sessions delivered by third sector agencies.

A number of staff also recently completed a government-funded training for trainers course which will allow them to cascade training to other staff on the issue.

In the past year a number of resources have become available to support professionals identify and respond to FGM and to support survivors of FGM. These are listed the [FGM Support Organisations](#) document. Included are online resources and guidance published by the UK Government Home Office.

ⁱ [Tackling FGM in Scotland – towards a Scottish model of intervention¹](#), Scottish Refugee Council 2014

ⁱⁱ Delivery of the plan is led by the Corporate Inequalities Team and is overseen by Short Life Working group on FGM, with membership of the group drawn from a wide range of services and reporting into the GBV leads group.