



Freephone 24-Hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline: **0808 2000 247**

or visit [www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk](http://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk) (access live chat Mon-Fri 3-10pm)

## **Female genital mutilation (FGM)**

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Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a collective term for a range of procedures which involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia for non-medical reasons. It is sometimes referred to as female circumcision, or female genital cutting. FGM is a global issue and happens all over the world. Practising communities tend to originate from parts of the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

**FGM is a crime in the UK.** It is also illegal to take a British national or permanent resident abroad for FGM or to help someone trying to do this. The maximum sentence for carrying out FGM or helping it to take place is 14 years in prison.

FGM is recognised internationally as a gross violation of the human rights of girls and women.

### **What are the health risks of FGM?**

Health risks of FGM include:

- Shock, haemorrhage and death
- Wound infections, including tetanus and gangrene, as well as blood-borne viruses such as HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C
- Damage to other organs, such as the urethra (where urine passes) and the bowel
- Chronic vaginal and pelvic infections
- Difficulty passing urine and persistent urine infections
- Abnormal periods – increased pain, prolonged blood flow due to reduced vaginal opening
- Kidney impairment and possible kidney failure
- Permanently tender scar tissue
- Pain during sex, lack of pleasurable sensation and related low libido
- Damage to the reproductive system, including infertility
- The need for later surgery to open the lower vagina for sexual intercourse and childbirth
- Complications in pregnancy and labour, and new-born deaths
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Depression, anxiety and low self-esteem

### Who is at risk?

You could be at risk of FGM if:

- You have family members who have experienced FGM
- Your husband's family has experienced FGM
- Your family or your husband's family come from a FGM-practising country
- Family or friends are talking about a 'special procedure', 'special occasion' or 'becoming a woman'
- Your family is planning a long holiday or a female elder is coming to visit

**FGM is a global issue.** Below is a list of the countries where some communities practise FGM. It is important to remember that British people descendant from these communities may be at risk, as might be women who marry into an FGM-practising community.

Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Colombia, Djibouti, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Indonesia, India, Iran, Iraq, Kenya, Kurdistan, Liberia, Malaysia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, Yemen

### When does it happen?

FGM is usually carried out on girls between the ages of one and 15, but younger babies, older girls and women can be victims too.

### Why does it happen?

FGM is a harmful traditional practice; multiple reasons and excuses for its continuation are given including to control sexuality, hygiene and as a form of initiating a girl into adulthood.

Although some claim FGM is carried out for religious reasons, FGM actually predates Islam, Christianity and Judaism and is not a requirement of any religion. Many religious leaders and organisations (including the Muslim Council of Britain and leaders from Pentecostal and Evangelical churches) have publicly condemned the practice.