WHAT IS FGM (FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION)?

Female genital mutilation (FGM) refers to procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

There are four main types of FGM:

• Clitoridectomy removing parts of the clitoris.
• Excision-removing part or all of the clitoris and the inner labia.
• Infibulation narrowing of the vaginal opening by creating a seal, formed by cutting and repositioning the labia.
• Other harmful procedures to the female genitals such as cutting, piercing, pricking and burning the area.

The procedure is traditionally carried out by a woman with no medical training. Anaesthetics and antiseptic treatments are generally not used and the practice is usually carried out using knives, scissors, scalpels, pieces of glass or razor blades. Girls may have to be forcibly restrained, so the procedure can take place.

Historical reasons why FGM is performed
There are a number of cultural, religious and social reasons why FGM is practiced within communities. These include: social acceptance; family honour; ensuring a girl is deemed ready for marriage; preservation of a girl's virginity or chastity; custom and tradition; hygiene and cleanliness; and the mistaken belief it enhances fertility and makes childbirth safer.

Where is FGM done and who is at risk?
FGM is performed mainly in Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

In the UK, FGM tends to occur in areas with larger populations of communities who practice FGM, such as first-generation immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. These areas include London, Cardiff, Manchester, Sheffield, Northampton, Birmingham, Oxford, Crawley, Reading, Slough and Milton Keynes. The girls may also be taken to their countries of origin so that FGM can be carried out during the summer holidays, allowing them time to 'heal' before they return to school. There are also worries that some girls may have FGM performed in the UK.

It is estimated that over 20,000 girls under the age of 15 are at risk of FGM in the UK each year and that 66,000 women in the UK are living with the consequences of FGM. However, due to the ‘hidden’ nature of the crime the true extent is unknown.

What should CWU be doing to stop FGM?
If you are worried that a child may be at risk of FGM you can make an anonymous call to the free 24-hour FGM helpline on 0800 028 3550 at fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk. They can give advice, information and support for anyone concerned that a child's welfare is at risk as well as make a referral on your behalf to the relevant statutory body, where appropriate. Though callers’ details can remain anonymous, any information that could protect a child from abuse will be passed to the police or social services.
In addition to the above, as an organisation, the CWU continues to lobby and campaign against FGM, supporting Non-Governmental Organisations who share our concerns and position that FGM should be eradicated from all walks of society, both here in the UK and in those countries where this atrocity still takes place.

**Where does the law stand in the UK?**

FGM is illegal in the UK. It is also illegal to arrange for a child to be taken abroad for FGM. If caught, offenders face a large fine and a prison sentence of up to 14 years.

At the time of preparing this fact-sheet, despite FGM being practiced in the UK for many decades and the barbaric act being outlawed since 1985, not a single person carrying out FGM has ever been prosecuted in the UK (as of May 2014).

**Useful links & Sign-posting**

(Foundation for Women’s Health & Research & Development)

FORWARD
Helpline: 0208 960 4000
Website: www.forward.org.uk

Equality Now
Telephone: 0207 304 6902
Website: www.equalitynow.org

NSPCC
FGM helpline: 0800 028 3550
Website: www.nspcc.org.uk

Childline
Helpline: 0800 1111
Website: www.childline.org.uk

Metropolitan Police (Project Azure – FGM)
Helpline: 0207 161 2888

NHS
Website: http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/female-genital-mutilation/pages/introduction.aspx

*Source: NSPCC FGM factsheet and NHS choices.*