

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a procedure where the female genitals are deliberately cut, injured or changed, but where there's no medical reason for this to be done.

It's also known as "female circumcision" or "cutting", and by other terms such as sunna, gudniin, halalays, tahur, megrez and khitan, among others.

FGM is usually carried out on young girls between infancy and the age of 15, most commonly before puberty starts. It is illegal in the UK and is child abuse.

It's very painful and can seriously harm the health of women and girls. It can also cause long-term problems with sex, childbirth and mental health.

Help and support is available if you've had FGM or you're worried that someone may be at risk.

Forms of FGM

There are four main types of FGM:

- **Type 1 (clitoridectomy)** – removing part or all of the clitoris.
- **Type 2 (excision)** – removing part or all of the clitoris and the inner labia (lips that surround the vagina), with or without removal of the labia majora (larger outer lips).
- **Type 3 (infibulation)** – narrowing of the vaginal opening by creating a seal, formed by cutting and repositioning the labia.
- **Other harmful procedures** to the female genitals, including pricking, piercing, cutting, scraping or burning the area.

FGM is often performed by traditional circumcisers or cutters who do not have any medical training. However, in some countries it may be done by a medical professional.

Anaesthetics and antiseptics aren't generally used, and FGM is often carried out using knives, scissors, scalpels, pieces of glass or razor blades.

FGM often happens against a girl's will without her consent and girls may have to be forcibly restrained.

Effects of FGM

There are no health benefits to FGM and it can cause serious harm, including:

- constant pain
- pain and/or difficulty having sex
- repeated infections, which can lead to infertility
- bleeding, cysts and abscesses
- problems passing urine or incontinence
- depression, flashbacks and self-harm
- problems during labour and childbirth, which can be life-threatening for mother and baby

Some girls die from blood loss or infection as a direct result of the procedure.

FGM and Sex

FGM can make it difficult and painful to have sex. It can also result in reduced sexual desire and a lack of pleasurable sensation.

In some cases, a surgical procedure called a deinfibulation may be recommended, which can alleviate and improve some symptoms.

FGM and Pregnancy

Some women with FGM may find it difficult to become pregnant, and those who do conceive can have problems in childbirth.

FGM and Mental Health

FGM can be an extremely traumatic experience that can cause emotional difficulties throughout life, including;

- depression
- anxiety
- flashbacks to the time of the cutting
- nightmares and other sleep problems

In some cases, women may not remember having the FGM at all, especially if it was performed when they were an infant.

Treatment for FGM (deinfibulation)

Surgery can be performed to open up the vagina, if necessary. This is called deinfibulation.

It's sometimes known as a "reversal" although this name is misleading, as the procedure doesn't replace any removed tissue, and will not undo the damage caused. However, it can help many problems caused by FGM.

Surgery may be recommended for:

- women who are unable to have sex or have difficulty passing urine as a result of FGM
- pregnant women at risk of problems during labour or delivery as a result of FGM

Deinfibulation should be carried out before getting pregnant, if possible. It can be done in pregnancy or labour if necessary, but ideally should be done before the last two months of pregnancy. The surgery involves making a cut (incision) to open the scar tissue over the entrance to the vagina.