



Birmingham & Solihull  
Women's Aid

FGM Project

# Voices of women FGM

Women from communities that practice FGM (female genital mutilation) would like professionals to understand their views on FGM, to help them in their work on this issue.

To find out how you could help, turn the page...

## FGM Project

0121 685 8687 (ask for Khadija Jaamac)

## Birmingham & Solihull Women's Aid Helpline

0808 800 0028 (free from most mobiles and landlines)



**Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a collective term for procedures which include the partial or total removal of the external female genital organs, or injury to the female genital organs, for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons.**

FGM is a centuries old harmful practice that requires a number of approaches to eradicate it – The FGM project, run by Birmingham & Solihull Women's Aid, has developed an FGM project working with the community, raising awareness through education and discussing the issue in depth, since April 2010.

The Birmingham & Solihull Women's Aid FGM Project has worked with many different FGM practicing communities across Birmingham, and recorded the concerns of both women and professionals, identifying a gap in the understanding of each other's perspectives.

On the one hand, there is a community that is sometimes fearful of the intentions of professionals (with the possible exception of midwives). On the other hand, there are professionals, many just learning about FGM and who may want to identify child protection concerns or consider how best to support families from an FGM practicing country.

The project has identified that women would like professionals to know their views and concerns when working on the subject of FGM. These include:

- Communities really appreciate the human rights structure in the UK and believe in upholding these laws. FGM being illegal helps families discontinue the practice.
- Having a law that bans FGM is a first step towards eradicating the practice.
- Many communities do not identify with the term 'FGM', and may find it offensive. The term 'female circumcision' is preferred, rather than 'mutilation', when describing FGM.
- Communities feel that they may be stigmatised if they are seen just in terms of FGM alone.
- FGM is a complex issue, with many different practices amongst communities, spreading across 40 countries – for some, it is the community that takes responsibility for undertaking FGM, whilst in others, the responsibility rests on the family itself. Many communities are not aware of these differences and only know about their own practice around FGM.

- There is often considerable community and family pressure to have FGM carried out.
- There is genuine misunderstanding as to the consequences of female circumcision – for many people it is viewed as similar to male circumcision. Education about the effects of FGM usually leads to support for ending FGM.
- The lifelong and dangerous after effects are not identified as being a result of FGM – as many women cannot easily connect their problems with having had FGM.
- Women are not always aware of what type of FGM has been done to them and can be deeply traumatised when they find out that a more severe type has been performed and that this is the root of many of the health and psychological problems they have experienced.
- Communities have worked together to ensure that children are safeguarded, often in war torn zones and facing poverty – concern for children and wanting the best for them is integral to them, especially as many believe 'it takes a village to raise a child'.

Women would like professionals to take time to understand their views as they are concerned that they may be negatively judged if they disclose anything about FGM or seek support on the issue.

Women would really value sensitive services that try to look at the cause of their health problems (FGM), rather than just addressing the symptoms and need support for the issues they face regarding FGM. Community education is also valued in terms of raising communities' awareness of the issue.

Women's Aid's FGM project has proved that education and awareness is one of the most effective ways of eradicating the practice – 90% of women worked with, once they understand what the consequences of FGM are, become committed to ending the practice.

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