

The potential to weaponise an accusation of female genital cutting/mutilation (FGCM) in children



Dr Jade Rennie - ST5 O&G Registrar
Dr Sakaria Ali - Consultant Paediatrician
Miss Hazel Learner - Consultant Gynaecologist

Objective

Female Genital Cutting/Mutilation (FGCM) is defined as any procedure whereby there is partial or total removal, or other injury to the external female genitalia, which is not medically necessary.

It is widely considered an international human rights violation and is performed in some communities for a variety of socio-cultural reasons.

FGCM was criminalised in the UK in 1985, and since then several policies and legislation have been introduced with the intention to protect children from FGCM.

In England and Wales, these include mandatory reporting duty of under 18 year olds where there is disclosure, or physical signs indicate FGCM; mandatory recording any cases of FGCM to a national database, and the potential of prosecution of those who perform, assist FGCM, including prosecution of parents who fail to protect their child from undergoing FGCM.

Method

This was a retrospective review of children and young people (C/YP) under 18 years of age referred to a specialist children and young people's FGCM clinic over a ten year period.

Data on demographics, referral concerns and social history was extracted from their medical records.

The data was collected and analysed in Excel

Results

9 referred with an allegation from within the family in the context of an acrimonious parental relationship breakdown

155 had no history of FGCM

6 referred following social services or the police receiving an allegation from an anonymous source

282 Children/Young People seen in FGCM Clinic 2014-2024

- Accusations included:
- 9 about recent or planned travel to African nations,
 - 5 overheard support or plans for FGC/M
 - 2 that FGCM had been performed.

- The age of these 16 C/YP ranged from 1-16 with a median age of 6.
- The majority (15/16 94%) had an African ethnicity
- 5/16 of the C/YP were born in the UK.

There was no family history of FGCM 2/6 of the children referred following **anonymous** allegations, and no family history in 4/9 of the children referred due to allegations from **within** their family.

Police were involved in 11 of the referrals to the clinic with social care involvement in all.

Conclusions

The right to bodily integrity and to safeguard children from FGCM is paramount. However, it should be recognised that an allegation of FGCM with potential cascade of social and police involvement **has the potential to be be weaponised.**

This data supports the idea that accusations of FGCM can be used against children and families for malicious intent.

References

- WHO Female Genital Mutilation Factsheet – Last updated 31/1/2025 - <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation>
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- Pantazis C, Carver N, Karlsen S, Mogilnicka M, White R. Pre-crime, hyper-vigilance and the over-surveillance of migrant-heritage families in 'FGM-safeguarding' in England and Wales. Critical and Radical Social Work. 2025 Feb 24:1-9.