
Date: 24th February 2014

To: **Health and Well-Being Board**

From: **Dr Jane Moore, Director of Public Health**

Subject: **Tackling Female Genital Mutilation in Coventry**

Purpose

To update the board on work being undertaken to tackle FGM in Coventry

Recommendations

Health and Well-Being Board is recommended to:

- Support the motion approved by Council condemning the practice of FGM
- Endorse the establishment of a working group to develop and implement a local multi-agency action plan to tackle FGM
- Ensure that agencies represented on the Health and Well-being Board are actively involved in this programme of work.

1. Background

- 1.1 Female genital mutilation (FGM), also known as female circumcision or female genital cutting, is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as ***"all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons"***.
- 1.2 Procedures are mostly carried out on young girls sometime between infancy and aged 15, and occasionally on adult women. 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.
- 1.3 It has been estimated that over 20,000 girls under the age of 15 are at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM) in the UK each year, and that 66,000 women in the UK are living with the consequences of FGM. However, the true extent is unknown due to the 'hidden' nature of the crime¹.
- 1.4 At its meeting of the 3rd December 2013, Council approve a motion that condemned the practice of female genital mutilation and called on steps to be taken locally to enforce the law to prevent women and girls being taken out of UK legal jurisdiction with the intention of carrying out FGM. It also called for better enforcement of the law against parents/guardians who permit FGM and practitioners who carry it out and better education to support girls to resist FGM, boys to oppose this and to empower communities to confront it. It called upon all the agencies locally to play a part in collective action against FGM.

2. The local picture

2.1 In 2010 there were 301 births in Coventry to mothers born outside of the UK where FGM is practiced. Based on the assumptions of FGM prevalence within the mothers' country of origin it is estimated that 145 women living in Coventry who gave birth in 2010 may have undergone FGM. This equates to 3% of the total women giving birth in 2010. Evidence suggests that for these women there may be an increased risk of childbirth complications and new-born deaths. For those mothers who have undergone FGM there is also the potential risk that their female children will also undergo the procedure.

2.2 There are a number of steps that have been taken locally across a range of agencies to address FGM in Coventry:

- The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) has been working in partnership to address FGM locally, since 2009. To date they have produced Children and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Safeguarding Procedures, a FGM Guidance Sheet for Professionals and FGM Awareness Training for professionals. The LSCB also send out pre and post summer holiday alerts highlighting the risks of FGM.
- The Meridian Centre (a General Practice which looks after newly-arrived asylum-seekers in Coventry) routinely asked new registrations about FGM. If they see female clients who have undergone FGM who have female children they will inform them of the legal aspect of FGM and if they have concerns they will refer them to Safeguarding.
- West Midlands Police have launched Operation Sentinel. This is a force wide initiative aimed at protecting the most vulnerable members of society in the West Midlands particularly those who are victims or are at risk of child sexual exploitation, honor-based violence, human trafficking, female genital mutilation and domestic abuse.
- In addition, Coventry University is part of a EU-wide programme (REPLACE 2) to evaluate best practice in tackling FGM.
- All schools in Coventry are being contacted to make them aware of the risks of FGM, particularly in the run-up to the summer holidays when girls may be taken abroad for female circumcision.

3. What we need to do next?

There are a number of steps we need to take to deliver a comprehensive city-wide programme of work to tackle to FGM. These include:

- Establishing a multi-agency group, led by public health, to develop a local action plan. This should:
 - Include representation from safeguarding, education, police and criminal justice, general practice, midwifery and gynaecology.
 - Identify best practice from other parts of the country which have higher levels of FGM.
 - Review local clinical pathways for women and girls who have been subject to FGM, including local arrangements for referral and treatment (deinfibulation). This should draw on national standards and best practice developed by the national FGM clinical group.
 - Improve local data collection systems for recording FGM to give a more accurate picture of the true levels of FGM locally.

Queries to:

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