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**To:** Coventry Health and Wellbeing Board

**Date:** 10 April 2017

**From:** Liz Gaulton, Director of Public Health

**Subject:** Female Genital Mutilation

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## **1 Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to update Coventry Health and Wellbeing Board on progress made to tackle Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Coventry. The paper also provides an update on the prevalence of FGM in Coventry and progress against the recommendations endorsed by Scrutiny Coordination Committee in 2015.

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 Coventry Health and Wellbeing Board is recommended to:
- 1) Consider the progress update contained in section 5 of the report
  - 2) Identify any further areas for discussion or consideration

## **3 Information and Background**

- 3.1 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".
- 3.2 The practice is mostly carried out by traditional circumcisers, who often play other central roles in communities, such as attending childbirths. Procedures are mostly carried out on young girls sometime between infancy and aged 15, and occasionally on adult women.
- 3.3 Immediate complications can include severe pain, shock, haemorrhage, tetanus, gangrene or sepsis, urine retention, open sores in the genital region and injury to nearby genital tissue, wound infections, as well as blood-borne viruses such as HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C and in some cases death. Long-term consequences can include recurrent bladder and urinary tract infections, abnormal periods, cysts, infertility, an increased risk of childbirth complications and new-born deaths, chronic vaginal and pelvic infections, kidney impairment and possible kidney failure and the need for later surgeries. Psychological and mental health problems include depression and anxiety, and flashbacks during pregnancy and childbirth.
- 3.4 FGM predates Christianity, Islam and Judaism, and the Bible, Koran, Torah and other religious texts do not advocate or justify FGM. In some societies, FGM is considered a

cultural tradition, which is often used as an argument for its continuation. Religious leaders take varying positions with regard to FGM: some promote it, some consider it irrelevant to religion, and others oppose it and contribute to its elimination. Local structures of power and authority, such as community leaders, religious leaders, circumcisers, and even some medical personnel can contribute to upholding the practice.

### 3.5 Reasons given for practising FGM:

- It brings status and respect to the girl
- It preserves a girl's virginity/chastity
- It is part of being a woman
- It is a rite of passage
- It gives a girl social acceptance, especially for marriage
- It upholds the family honour
- It cleanses and purifies the girl
- It gives the girl and her family a sense of belonging to the community
- It fulfils a religious requirement believed to exist
- It perpetuates a custom/tradition
- It helps girls and women to be clean and hygienic
- It is cosmetically desirable
- It is mistakenly believed to make childbirth safer for the infant

3.6 The issue of FGM in Coventry was raised by Councillor Gingell at Council in December 2013 where a motion to condemn the practice was supported. Coventry City Council was the first Council to support such a motion, and a number of other councils have now taken a motion through to end FGM. Public Health were asked to establish a FGM Task & Finish Group to gather knowledge and intelligence on the extent of FGM in Coventry, how it is being addressed by various partners and the barriers in dealing with FGM.

3.7 An in depth report was developed in 2015 that identified prevalence of FGM in Coventry and included recommendations to eradicate the practice. Recommendations included:

- Preventing FGM from taking place by raising awareness and engaging with communities
- Supporting professionals to identify and support girls and women at risk of or affected by FGM by delivering specialist training programmes, empowering professionals and encouraging them to refer them via safeguarding procedures
- Supporting victims of FGM throughout their lives by offering women access to a specialist FGM midwife at UHCW and providing specialist support services
- Building knowledge and intelligence by collecting and sharing data between agencies where appropriate

## 4 The Current Position

4.1 It is important to note that data for FGM is limited, both locally and nationally. Much of the data available is based on the 2011 census. This issue is being tackled nationally with the introduction of mandatory requirements for Healthcare Professionals to record FGM.

4.2 It is estimated that 125 million women and girls worldwide have undergone FGM, and that 3 million girls are subjected to FGM every year. It is estimated that 137,000 women and girls are living with FGM in the UK and that 60,000 girls aged 13 and under are at risk of FGM.<sup>2</sup>

4.3 A recent report by City University London and Equality Now<sup>1</sup> looked at prevalence of FGM in England and Wales and developed estimates of the numbers of women with FGM living in England and Wales, the numbers of women with FGM giving birth and the numbers of girls born to women with FGM. To derive these estimates the report used the results of household interview surveys in the countries in which FGM is practised, demographic data about women born in these countries and girls born to them was derived from the 2011 census and from birth registration. The survey found that;

- London as a whole has the highest prevalence rates, with 21 women per 1,000 affected by FGM. The 10 highest prevalence rates are located in local authorities within the capital.
- Manchester, Slough, Bristol, Leicester and Birmingham have high prevalence rates, ranging from 12 to 16 per 1,000,
- Milton Keynes, Cardiff, Coventry, Sheffield, Reading, Thurrock, Northampton and Oxford had rates of more than seven per 1,000.
- Rural areas show prevalence's of well below one per 1,000, but cases were found in all local authorities in England and Wales.

4.4 Since 1 April 2014 Acute NHS Trusts (Foundation and non-Foundation) must provide returns to the Department of Health on a monthly basis of the prevalence of FGM within their treated population. Between April 2015 and March 2016 there have been 65 women accessing UHCW midwifery services that have been affected by FGM. 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.

4.5 Police data for the West Midlands shows FGM referrals to West Midlands Police (WMP):

| <b>Year</b>                    | <b>Total referrals to WMP</b> | <b>Coventry Referrals</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>April 2014 – March 2015</b> | 119                           | 62                        | 52%               |
| <b>April 2015 – March 2016</b> | 126                           | 57                        | 45%               |
| <b>April 2016 to date</b>      | 146                           | 20                        | 14%               |

4.6 The high percentage of Coventry referrals during 2014-2016 may be due to the well-established referral processes and reporting procedures in Coventry. Historically it has been UHCW policy to refer all females affected by FGM who give birth to a girl to West Midlands Police for a joint visit with social care.

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<sup>1</sup> City University London and Equality Now. Prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation in England and Wales: National and local estimates, July 2015

- 4.7 More recently it has been noted by professionals that a home visit by police in uniform is not always appropriate and can sometimes alienate community members. As a result the Department of Health developed the FGM risk assessment tool to clarify referral processes dependant on risk to the child, this risk assessment tool has been implemented at UHCW to ensure that appropriate referrals are made. This has resulted in a drop in the proportion of Coventry referrals to West Midlands Police, but ensures that only appropriate referrals are made.
- 4.8 According to the 2011 Census data 3% (868) children aged 0-15 and 7% (5,422) women aged 16-49 living in Coventry were born in regions likely to be affected by FGM.

| <b>Country of birth of the Female population aged 0-15 and 16-49 in Coventry. Census 2011</b> |                    |           |                  |           |
|---|--------------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|
|   | <b>Age 0 to 15</b> |           | <b>Age 16-49</b> |           |
| <b>Country of Birth</b>   | <b>Number</b>      | <b>%</b>  | <b>Number</b>    | <b>%</b>  |
| <b>Total Numbers of women in Coventry</b>   | <b>31,065</b>      |           | <b>78,219</b>    |           |
| Africa: North Africa e.g. Egypt   | 68                 | 0.2       | 247              | 0.3       |
| Africa: Central and Western Africa e.g. Mali, Sierra Leone, Guinea                            | 228                | 0.7       | 1651             | 2.1       |
| Africa: South and Eastern Africa e.g. Northern Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia    | 454                | 1.5       | 2854             | 3.6       |
| Africa: Africa not otherwise specified  | 4                  | 0.0       | 58               | 0.1       |
| Middle East and Asia: Middle East e.g. Yemen  | 114                | 0.4       | 612              | 0.8       |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>868</b>         | <b>3%</b> | <b>5,422</b>     | <b>7%</b> |

\*The age range has been split to capture the numbers of potential victims of FGM (aged 0-15 years) and those who may have already had the procedure.

## **5 Local progress to date**

- 5.1 In June 2015, Coventry City Council's Public Health team commissioned Coventry Haven (in partnership with CRASAC and Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid) to provide a specialist FGM service to tackle FGM in Coventry. This service is the main vehicle through which partners are working to eliminate FGM in Coventry, and through which the recommendations made by Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee in 2015 are being delivered.
- 5.2 **Recommendation 1: Preventing FGM from taking place by raising awareness and engaging with communities**
1. Coventry Haven, in partnership with CRASAC and Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid, has engaged with communities in a number of ways to raise awareness about FGM, change attitudes towards FGM, and ultimately prevent FGM from taking place. From 1 June 2015 to 31 November 2016, the service attended 116 different community groups in targeted locations, to raise awareness and recruit community champions to end FGM. Some examples of the groups attended include:
- Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre Women's Group
  - Willenhall Community Forum
  - Women's Networking Group at Sidney Stringer Academy

- Foleshill Women's Training Centre
  - Coventry Refugee and Migrant Men Group
  - Allesley Park Muslim Women's Group
  - Turkish Mosque Women's Group, Foleshill
  - Multi-faith Forum and New Muslim Women's Group, Muslim Resource Centre
  - Cheylesmore Somali Community Association Women's Group
  - Friendship Group Meeting, Central Library
  - Woodend Youth Club
2. By raising awareness and engaging with communities, the service have managed to recruit 32 community champions to date. These are individuals from countries of origin or communities known to practice FGM who have volunteered to undertake engagement activities within communities to raise awareness about FGM, change attitudes and behaviour and prevent FGM from taking place. The community champions come from 15 different countries of origin, including Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Tanzania and Kenya, where it is estimated that over 70% of the female population are estimated to have undergone FGM. The service is working with these community champions to ensure that they are skilled to tackle FGM and built assets and engagement within their communities.
3. Public Health and the voluntary sector have worked in partnership to develop two films on FGM. One is an educational film featuring influential local leaders from the council, voluntary sector and faith based organisations including the chairs of the British Arab Federation and Coventry's Muslim Forum. This film educates viewers about the practice, the law in regards to FGM, the harmful consequences of FGM and the need for communities to oppose it. A second film entitled 'It Stops with Me' was developed starring local people who are committed to ending FGM. It was designed to raise awareness of the dangers of FGM and encourage practising communities to oppose it; links to the films are below. The films have been viewed approximately 1,300 times.

FGM Interviews - [https://youtu.be/ak\\_g8woS4Zc](https://youtu.be/ak_g8woS4Zc) (11 minutes 56 seconds)

FGM It Stops With Me - <https://youtu.be/Q16OmOp26bk> (2 minutes 30 seconds)

4. Public Health have supported Coventry University in their development of a webapp for young people. Researchers at Coventry University have created the new app, endorsed by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children ([NSPCC](#)), to help protect young girls and women from female genital mutilation (FGM). The webapp, developed jointly by experts at Coventry University's Centre for Communities and Social Justice (CCSJ) the Centre for Excellence in Learning Enhancement (CELE) at Coventry University and in partnership with Coventry City Council, is proving to be a valuable resource in the fight against FGM. The app, which works across most mobile devices such as smartphones, tablets and lap tops via an internet browser, is aimed primarily at young girls living in affected communities and at risk from FGM. In the last six months of 2016, there were between 3,072 and 4,812 users of the webapp. Users were referred from a number of local and national locations, including the Coventry University website, Facebook, the Telegraph, as well as other local authority websites. The visits come from a number of locations, but as the webapp is designed to be lightweight, single page and untraceable as far as possible, it is difficult to

obtain accurate data on exactly how and where the webapp is being used. A link to the webapp is included here: <http://petals.coventry.ac.uk/>

5. West Midlands Police have produced a poster campaign for International Day of Zero Tolerance (IDZT) for FGM. The posters include child and adult examples with a cross range of communities, and uses the hashtag #FGMletstalk.
6. West Midlands police have also worked with Birmingham airport and the airport policing unit on an FGM campaign. A training package on FGM has been developed for all new staff, and this is now part of basic training, and stickers have been placed in toilets in departures as well as arrivals encouraging people to call police if they are worried about any of the issues.

### 5.3 **Recommendation 2: Supporting professionals to identify and support girls and women at risk of or affected by FGM**

1. Coventry Haven, in partnership with CRASAC and Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid, is providing training to professionals community members and schools to enable them to understand FGM, the risks and signs to look out for, what to do if a girl or woman is thought to be at risk of FGM and how to support a girl or woman who has been affected by FGM. The service has delivered over 50 training sessions since June 2015. Training has been delivered to over 750 individuals, including:
  - Teachers – primary and secondary
  - Other school and college professionals
  - Nurses
  - Social care workers
  - Midwives
  - Children / family support workers
  - Children's centre staff
  - Voluntary sector staff
  - GPs
  - Youth workers
  - Health visitors
  - Police officers

Of those who received training, 87% reported an increase in their knowledge of FGM, 94% reported an increase in their knowledge of the consequences of FGM, 96% reported an increase in their knowledge of FGM and the law, 82% reported increased confidence in discussing FGM, and 99% reported a change in their perception of FGM.

2. In addition, in 2016, Coventry City Council commissioned Coventry University to launch a new FGM webapp, building on 'Petals', tailored for professionals. The new FGM webapp, 'Petals for Professionals' was launched in October 2016. The webapp includes information on the signs that someone may be at risk of FGM, information about how to have appropriate conversations about FGM, how to fulfil mandatory reporting requirements and contains specific sections for social workers, teachers and healthcare professionals to explain their

responsibilities and actions to take. Over 50 people attended the launch event back in October, and the webapp is currently being disseminated to social workers, teachers, healthcare professionals and others both locally and nationally. A link to the webapp is included here: <http://petals.coventry.ac.uk/professionals/>

3. The Local Children's Safeguarding Board (LSCB) has been working partnership to address FGM locally since 2009 and offers training, has developed a safeguarding procedure and website. The Coventry Safeguarding Board's policies and procedures have been updated to include FGM. All suspected cases continue to be referred as part of existing child safeguarding obligations, and information and support is given to families to protect girls at risk.
4. In June 2016, letters were sent by West Midlands Police to all safeguarding boards and headteachers in relation to the vulnerability of young people in the summer holidays who may be taken abroad for FGM. In February 2017, West Midlands Police sent letters to all headteachers and GPs across Coventry to remind them of their mandatory reporting duties under the Serious Crime Act.
5. Secondary Schools have been provided with lesson plans and are encouraged to deliver a whole school approach to FGM. Anecdotal feedback has shown that a number of schools have delivered FGM sessions to pupils and a number of students are currently leading their own projects to raise awareness of FGM. A group of students recently piloted the new FGM app developed by Coventry University and presented this work at a national and local launch.

#### 5.4 **Recommendation 3: Supporting victims of FGM throughout their lives**

1. The Ending FGM in Coventry service, commissioned by Coventry City Council, provides specialist one-to-one emotional support to survivors of FGM. To date, the service has provided one-to-one emotional support to 45 women, and has had an average of 6 contacts with each woman (including telephone support, drop in sessions and one-to-one appointments). Most women have referred themselves for one-to-one support, following training or community engagement sessions, but other referrals have come from the voluntary sector, social care, schools and word of mouth. The numbers of self-referrals and disclosures is evidence that the service is reaching and engaging with communities effectively, as women feel safe to come forward and receive support. In some cases, those who have received support have been signposted to GPs and other healthcare professionals, the police and to CRASAC, who offer specialist counselling for victims of FGM. As a result of their support from the Ending FGM in Coventry service, 59% reported a reduction in stress, 75% reported feeling less alone, 57% reported feeling more in control of their lives, 67% reported increased self-confidence, 53% reported improved physical health, 9% reported that they were able to gain or retain employment when they might not have done otherwise, and 10% reported they were able to start or continue to volunteer, which they may not have otherwise been able to. In addition, through the one-to-one support provided, the service estimates that it has managed to prevent 81 cases of FGM since June 2015.
2. The service has also been liaising with GPs and with UHCW to ensure that any child or woman who has undergone FGM is offered medical help, as well as psychological support

or counselling. UHCW continues to offer women access to a specialist midwife or consultant through the provision of dedicated clinic time, and the Ending FGM service ensures that those who have undergone FGM receive the medical help that they need.

#### **5.5 Recommendation 4: Building knowledge and intelligence**

Progress in the collection of FGM data continues to improve both locally and nationally. Locally, Public Health continue to work with key stakeholders such as the MASH, UHCW and West Midlands Police to gather data and share intelligence to ensure that knowledge of the extent of FGM improves. The Ending FGM Service has also helped to gather intelligence in regard to practicing communities, and this will help shape services in future and ensure that all initiatives can be monitored in terms of success.

### **6. Next Steps**

- 6.1 A significant amount of work to tackle FGM has been undertaken by the 'Ending FGM in Coventry Service', commissioned by Coventry City Council and provided by Coventry Haven, in partnership with CRASAC and Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid (BSWA) over the last 18 months. The contract with Coventry Haven, CRASAC and BSWA comes to an end on 31 May 2017 and there are no resources available to extend the contract beyond that date. However, the service was designed to be self-sustaining through the recruitment of community champions.
- 6.2 Coventry's work to tackle FGM has been highlighted regionally and nationally as an example of good practice, and the evidence from the work that Coventry has undertaken is being incorporated into national policy. This will help to ensure that community engagement and development work continues to tackle FGM, for example through the national FGM centre developed by Barnado's and the LGA which is aiming to work with all local authorities to end FGM within 15 years.
- 6.2 A number of measures will be implemented over the coming months to ensure the service's work to engage with communities, train professionals and support women who have undergone FGM can be sustained beyond 31 May 2017:
- Enhanced training and support for community champions to develop their resilience and ensure they are able to continue to work within communities to raise awareness, change attitudes and ultimately prevent FGM.
  - Further dissemination and promotion of the webapp 'Petals for Professionals' to enable professionals to support those who have undergone FGM, spot the signs of those at risk and report concerns appropriately.
  - Development and communication of clear referral pathways for survivors of FGM to access therapeutic counselling and emotional support provided by Coventry Haven and CRASAC, and community engagement to enable and encourage self-referrals to continue
  - A refresh of the multiagency FGM Steering Group to bring professionals from a variety of organisations together (UHCW, West Midlands Police, Coventry City Council, the voluntary sector, Coventry and Rugby CCG) to consider further measures for partnership working and next steps to tackle FGM.



**Report Author(s):**

**Name and Job Title:**

Liz Gaulton, Director of Public Health

Georgia Faherty, Public Health Programme Manager – Inequalities

**Directorate:** People

**Telephone and E-mail Contact:**

024 7683 1950

[Georgia.faherty@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:Georgia.faherty@coventry.gov.uk)

Enquiries should be directed to the above person.