

FGM - what is it, why is it so serious and what can we all do to help?

Abebe is 12. Abebe's friends have noticed she's been acting oddly since she flew back from staying with her aunt and uncle in Ethiopia for a few weeks. Abebe is much quieter now and doesn't want to play football anymore. She spends ages in the toilets and sometimes comes out in tears. She's started to skip school saying she 'hates sitting down all day.'



Challenge: What has happened to Abebe? How do you know?

More challenging: Is there anything Abebe's friends could have done to help her? What about now? Explain.

Mega Challenging: Explain why you think FGM still continues in the modern day world.

FGM - what is it, why is it so serious and what can we all do to help?

Key terms:

FGM – Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is the act of cutting some or all of a female person's external genitals, for reasons which are not medical. It is also sometimes referred to as female circumcision.

Learning Outcomes:

Identify what to look out for when a victim may have, or may be soon to experience FGM.

Describe how girls are encouraged into the process and reasons why it's often unreported.

Explain why girls feel so much pressure, analyse the link between FGM and patriarchal societies and the main factors for why there are so few prosecutions for FGM.

What do we all need to know about FGM?

READING ALOUD OPPORTUNITY

We will now read the info sheets as a class.

FGM Information:

What is FGM?

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is the act of cutting some or all of a female person's external genitalia, for reasons which are not medical. It is also sometimes referred to as female circumcision.

There are different types of FGM:

Clitoridectomy is where part or all of the clitoris is removed.

Excision is where part or all of the female person's clitoris and the lips surrounding vagina are removed. The outer lips may or may not be removed.

Infibulation is the most severe type of FGM. This is where the female person's outer lips and clitoris are removed, and her genitalia are stitched up so that she cannot have sex, or cannot get any pleasure from having sex. A small opening is left so that the girl can still go to the toilet and have her period. If a woman who has undergone this kind of FGM gets pregnant, her genitalia then have to be unstitched to allow her to give birth, her genitalia are then sewn back-up again after she has given birth.

Who Does It Happen To?

FGM happens to girls, at any age, but usually when they are below the age of 15. It may be carried out when a girl is a baby, or in her childhood, adolescence, or even before she gets married or pregnant. It is estimated that 200 million women and girls alive today have undergone FGM.

FGM is often performed by people who do not have medical training, using a razor blade, without any painkillers or anaesthetic.

Where Does It Happen?

FGM happens in 29 countries, mainly in Africa, the Middle East and some parts of Asia. The most severe kind of FGM, called infibulation, is mainly done in North-Eastern African countries like Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan. However, because of migration, there are also people affected by FGM living in Europe, Australia, North America, and other countries worldwide.



It is illegal for anyone to carry out FGM in the UK. No arrests have been made for FGM in the UK. However, just because nobody has been arrested doesn't mean it isn't going on. There are an estimated 130,000 women and girls who are affected by FGM in the UK, and in 2014, hospitals across England reported an average of 18 new cases of FGM per day.

Why Does It Happen?

FGM is mainly carried out for cultural reasons. It is considered to be a tradition which promotes modesty and what is considered to be 'appropriate' sexual behaviour in women. It is supposed to just women off having sex, so that they don't have sex before marriage and only have sex with one person (their husband). It is sometimes also considered to be a sign of religious faith, or a symbol of passing into adulthood. FGM is often carried out by women on younger girls.

The girls' relatives or elders may try to describe the procedure normal and symbolizing a 'coming of age'. It is not normal or healthy for a body to have parts cut off for non-medical reasons. It can lead to all sorts of debilitating, life-long health problems, constant pain, bleeding, infections and even death. Women who are the victims of FGM are far more likely to die giving birth.

What Can I Do About It?

If you suspect someone of having had FGM, performing FGM, planning or organising FGM you should report it to the police. It is illegal for anyone living in the UK to perform FGM or to take their child abroad to have FGM. Anyone found guilty of the offence can face up to 14 years in prison. However, it's important to remember that nobody will go to prison for having had FGM done to them. They are the victim. If you know someone who this is likely to happen to, you have a responsibility to report this (you could end up saving their life).

Look out for the telltale signs of FGM in girls, which include: difficulty walking, sitting or standing, spending longer in the bathroom, long unexplained absences from school, reluctance to go to the toilet.

FGM is an abuse of human rights and we must all play our part in spotting it so that we can prevent any more girls from suffering this trauma. If you are worried about FGM or think you might know someone who is affected by FGM, you can contact the NSPCC FGM helpline on 0800 038 3550 or email: fgmhelp@nspcc.org



Task 1 - Your teacher will put you in small groups for this. Discuss the article, try and empathise what she is going through, what Human Rights issues are there?

Why is this still happening to young girls from the UK?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2uZ1X0mFiQ>

ONLY UP TO 6.19 on videoclip.

Watch the clip and answer the questions at your challenge level.

What do all the people who've had it done have in common?

What happened to Najima?

What does brainwashed mean?

What did Najima hear when she went to her neighbours house?

Why do some people find it hard to even speak about FGM?

Why don't the girls just say no?

What does 'haram' mean?

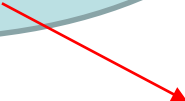
What do relatives say to make girls feel like they should have FGM done?

Why don't the girls have the procedure properly explained to them before they go?

Why do you think some men want women to have this done? (clue - the clitoris plays a big part in women enjoying sex).



Why are there so few
prosecutions for
FGM?



Policing cuts

Lack of awareness

Families involved

Pressure on victim

Language barriers

Not government priority

Often happens abroad so expensive to
investigate

Would need to be proved.

ADDITIONAL - OPTIONAL

Another traditional but barbaric cultural practice which many people may not have heard of before is breast ironing. This practice again targets women and has a long history of scarring young girls for life as well as causing immense pain during application.

It's hard to believe still this happens today. Many of you may be able to see the similarities in reasoning for both FGM and breast ironing - we will discuss these shortly.

1. Watch the clip carefully. You don't need to write anything at this point.
2. Read as a class the information sheet then answer the questions at your **challenge level**.
3. Be prepared to discuss your ideas as a class.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=imCmlG3_3tc



Breast Ironing

What is breast ironing?

This is a process that is sometimes also known as breast flattening. It is the practice of trying to stop a young girl's breasts developing by flattening them. This often involves physical actions using the hands, such as massaging, pummeling or pinning. It can also involve using objects like rocks, hammers, coconut shells or other items, which are sometimes heated before being used.

It also has long-term consequences for a girl's health, such as depression and possibly cancer, as well as mental health problems such as self-harm. The process is classed as child abuse in the UK and several other countries.

Where does breast ironing happen?

It is a cultural practice most commonly found in Cameroon. However, it does occur in some other countries in Africa, such as Chad, Togo and Zimbabwe, amongst others. The UN estimates that as many as 3.8 million girls worldwide are or have been affected by breast ironing. In the UK, there are around 1000 girls of West African heritage who have been subjected to breast ironing, but in reality the figure is likely to be significantly higher.

Why does breast ironing happen?

The people who carry out this practice believe that preventing a young girl's breasts from developing will keep her safe from rape and prevent her from being forced into an early marriage. Therefore, the people who carry out the practice, who are usually the mothers of the young girls, claim that it is in the best interests of the girls.

What can I do if I think I know someone who is affected by breast ironing?

While there aren't many charities which are solely dedicated to supporting victims of breast ironing, you could get in touch with an organisation like Freedom Charity or Forward UK, which are both charities working with women affected by cultural and gender-based violence.

Questions

Challenging

1. Where does breast ironing happen most commonly?
2. What is another name for breast ironing?
3. Why would a mother want to stop her daughter from developing breasts?

More challenging

1. Is breast ironing legal in the UK? How do you know?
2. Why is it likely that the real number of victims of breast ironing in the UK is much higher? (in other words - why aren't all cases being reported?)
3. What are some of the most effective ways that breast ironing could be reduced, in your opinion?

Mega challenging

1. To what extent does breast ironing as a cultural practice embody the principle of victim blaming? Explain your answer fully.
2. Is the crime of breast ironing made worse by the fact that it is mainly carried out by the mothers of the young girls? Fully justify your answer.
3. What might be among the worst consequences of having been subjected to breast ironing for a young woman living in the UK? Explain at least three examples fully.

Plenary

Returning to the starter - how **COULD** you have helped Abebe before she left for Ethiopia? Analyse the best way, keeping in mind her relatives are involved and she may not be aware of what was going to happen.

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