

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

SUBMISSION FROM NSPCC

Summary of key points

- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is child abuse and is illegal in Scotland.
- The NSPCC provide advice and support to professionals and public on FGM through a helpline which is currently being promoted in England and Wales in a joint campaign with the Home Office
- The NSPCC also provides the ChildLine service, which has received a small number of contacts from children and young people about FGM over the last year.

About NSPCC Scotland

The NSPCC aims to end cruelty to children. Our vision is of a society where all children are loved, valued and able to fulfil their potential. We seek to achieve cultural, social and political change – influencing legislation, policy, practice, attitudes and behaviours, and delivering services for the benefit of all children and young people across the UK.

Issue

During an Equal Opportunities Committee roundtable on FGM in January the NSPCC raised awareness of the FGM helpline. In subsequent sessions witnesses have raised the lack of data on FGM in Scotland. The NSPCC would like to share some data from the FGM helpline and from ChildLine helpline and on-line service for children. All information provided is on a UK wide basis. The briefing includes an appendix which describes the key themes in calls to ChildLine about female genital mutilation

FGM Helpline

The total number of contacts received for female genital mutilation, from the launch of the FGM helpline in June 2013 to May 2014, is 245. Included in this figure are 50 contacts for advice, 110 contacts that resulted in referral and 85 enquiries. The table below gives a breakdown of the source of request to the helpline for contacts on advice and referral only (source of request is not recorded for enquiries). There are some cases where the source of request for contacts on advice and referral is not known, for example when the caller does not wish to disclose this information.

| Source of request | Advice | % Advice | Referrals | % Referrals | Total | % Total |
|--|-----------|-------------|-----------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| Other* | 23 | 50% | 20 | 23% | 43 | 33% |
| Public | 10 | 22% | 31 | 36% | 41 | 31% |
| Parent | 5 | 11% | 24 | 28% | 29 | 22% |
| Teacher* | 4 | 9% | 8 | 9% | 12 | 9% |
| Relative | 2 | 4% | 3 | 3% | 5 | 4% |
| Health Worker* | 2 | 4% | 0 | 0% | 2 | 2% |
| Total contacts where source is recorded | 46 | 100% | 86 | 100% | 132 | 100% |

**Teacher includes Education Welfare Officer and teacher*

**Health worker includes nurse and GP*

**Other includes police, children's services, social workers and researchers*

The majority of calls to the FGM helpline since its launch have come from urban areas within England. The NSPCC is committed to increasing the awareness of the helpline in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and greatly values any support to do this from other partners and organisations that strive to protect girls from this abuse.

ChildLine Information

In 2013/14, ChildLine dealt with 30 counselling sessions about Female Genital Mutilation.

In 25 of these counselling sessions, young people contacted ChildLine to discuss their own personal concerns about FGM and in 5 counselling sessions the contact had concerns for another young person who was at risk of FGM, most commonly a female relative.

In April 2013, ChildLine received the highest number of FGM counselling sessions when compared to the rest of the year. In this same month, a casualty episode was aired which focused on a young person's experiences of FGM which may have contributed to this surge. A small number of young people referred to the episode when speaking with ChildLine.

The majority (87%) of counselling sessions regarding FGM were with girls, however, in some cases gender was not disclosed during counselling. ChildLine also dealt with a small number of counselling sessions from males who had concerns about girls at risk of FGM.

The majority of FGM counselling sessions took place on the phone (67%) with 33% online. All the online contacts received were via 121 chats. This differs from the trend

in channel use overall, where increasingly we are seeing more young people being counselled online.

93% of people who contacted the service about FGM disclosed their age to ChildLine during counselling. Of these, 79% were 12-15 year olds, 14% were aged 16-18 and 7% were adult contacts over the age of 18.

Although the majority of young girls who contacted ChildLine about having experienced FGM were in their teens, most told the counsellor that the procedure had taken place years when they were much younger. Many described FGM as being part of their culture, and regarded as normal within the young person's community. It was not until the young person got older that they had begun questioning the procedure and the pain they had experienced.

During 2013/14, 5 referrals were made to external agencies as a result of young people being at risk of FGM. The agencies referred to include Social Services, CEOP and the Police. A Yougov poll of 1000 teachers found that 4 out of 5 of the teachers surveyed had not had FGM child protection training about girls at risk, 1 in 6 did not know FGM was illegal or that they have a legal duty to safe guard children at risk ¹

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17 June 2015

¹ YouGov plc for NSPCC (2013) Sample size: 1002 teachers in England and Wales.

Key themes in calls to ChildLine about female genital mutilation

Key Themes

Deception

Where the concern was FGM, many young girls told the ChildLine counsellor that the procedure had happened overseas; however, they had not been told that this was why they were going abroad. This left many feeling as though they had been deceived by their parents who had arranged the trip and encouraged the young person not to tell anyone that they were going away for fear that the trip might have been prevented.

Lack of Choice

A number of young people said that had they known they were being sent away to be subjected to such a painful procedure they would have tried to prevent it, although in the same breath, many felt this would have been a pointless attempt as they felt that they would not have been able to stop it regardless. Many knew that the cultural beliefs their parents had could not be challenged, so despite the young person feeling as though the actions had been wrong, they knew this was not something their parents would see.

Pain and Discomfort

Despite many young girls telling the ChildLine counsellor that they had been circumcised years ago, most said they still felt pain and regular discomfort as a result of the procedure. Sadly, in the majority of these cases the young person was reluctant to seek medical support because they feared what the Doctor would say, or were worried it might get their parents in trouble. This resulted in many young girls suffering with the pain on their own.

Flashbacks / Nightmares

In addition to physical pain, the emotional scars young girls who had been circumcised had were abundant. Many spoke about suffering from terrifying flashbacks and vivid nightmares that would keep them awake at night, stating the pain of that day haunted them, as did the memory of people they loved and trusted physically holding them down so the procedure could be completed. This was again something young girls felt unable to discuss with anyone because they were worried what would be thought of them.

Third Party

There were a number of young people, mainly girls, who contacted ChildLine about their concerns for their younger sibling. Many of the girls who contacted had been circumcised themselves, and so, wanted advice on how they could prevent their younger sister going through such a painful situation. Often the young person felt speaking to their parents would be pointless because they were set on custom, but they were also unsure about speaking to anyone else as they didn't want their parents to get in trouble.

Difficulties talking to anybody

Young people spoke about feeling isolated and unable to speak to anyone about what they had experienced for fear of judgement. Many said that the ChildLine counsellor was the first person they had been able to talk to, stating how difficult it was for them to vocalise what had happened. They also expressed how deeply traumatised they were about what had happened and were audibly emotional during their counselling sessions with ChildLine.

Snapshots of contacts to ChildLine from children and young people regarding female genital mutilation

Disclaimer:

All names and potentially identifying details have been changed to protect the identity of the child or young person. Snapshots are created from real ChildLine contacts but are not necessarily direct quotes from the young person.

I don't think anyone will be able to understand what I've been through. I don't want to go against my culture but my family lied to me. They didn't tell me that I was being sent away to be circumcised - I didn't even know what that meant. All I can remember is being held down and the pain. I think it will haunt me forever. I try to avoid talking about what happened to me because I think people will judge me, but I'm scared that if I don't tell, it will happen to other girls.

I was circumcised a while ago but I still have problems now. I'm not sure I agree with the procedure but it's part of my culture so I have to accept it. I wish I could speak to someone about the pain I regularly experience but I'm too scared because I don't think anyone would understand.

I'm so confused. I don't want to get my parents in trouble but I don't want my sister to get hurt. They are planning to send her overseas for a circumcision but she doesn't understand what is happening. I don't know what to do because I don't want to disrespect my parents but I know what they are doing isn't right.