

# Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a procedure where the female genitals are deliberately cut, injured or changed, but where there's no medical reason for this to be done.

It's also known as "female circumcision" or "cutting", and by other terms such as sunna, gudniin, halalays, tahur, megrez and khitan, among others.

FGM is usually carried out on young girls between infancy and the age of 15, most commonly before [puberty](#) starts. It is illegal in the UK and is child abuse.

It's very painful and can seriously harm the health of women and girls. It can also cause long-term problems with sex, childbirth and mental health.

Help and support is available if you've had FGM or you're worried that someone may be at risk.

## Forms of FGM

There are four main types of FGM:

- **Type 1 (clitoridectomy)** – removing part or all of the clitoris.
- **Type 2 (excision)** – removing part or all of the clitoris and the inner labia (lips that surround the vagina), with or without removal of the labia majora (larger outer lips).
- **Type 3 (infibulation)** – narrowing of the vaginal opening by creating a seal, formed by cutting and repositioning the labia.
- **Other harmful procedures** to the female genitals, including pricking, piercing, cutting, scraping or burning the area.

FGM is often performed by traditional circumcisers or cutters who do not have any medical training. However, in some countries it may be done by a medical professional.

Anaesthetics and antiseptics aren't generally used, and FGM is often carried out using knives, scissors, scalpels, pieces of glass or razor blades.

FGM often happens against a girl's will without her consent and girls may have to be forcibly restrained.

## Effects of FGM

**There are no health benefits to FGM and it can cause serious harm, including:**

- constant pain
- pain and/or difficulty having sex
- repeated infections, which can lead to infertility
- bleeding, cysts and abscesses
- problems passing urine or incontinence
- depression, flashbacks and self-harm
- problems during labour and childbirth, which can be life-threatening for mother and baby

Some girls die from blood loss or infection as a direct result of the procedure.

## **FGM and pregnancy**

Some women with FGM may find it difficult to become pregnant, and those who do conceive can have problems in childbirth.

## **FGM and mental health**

FGM can be an extremely traumatic experience that can cause emotional difficulties throughout life, including:

- depression
- anxiety
- flashbacks to the time of the cutting
- nightmares and other sleep problems

In some cases, women may not remember having the FGM at all, especially if it was performed when they were an infant.

## **Getting help and support**

All women and girls have the right to control what happens to their bodies and the right to say no to FGM.

Help is available if you've had FGM or you're worried that you or someone you know is at risk.

- **If someone is in immediate danger**, contact the police immediately by dialling 999.
- **If you're concerned that someone may be at risk**, contact the NSPCC helpline on 0800 028 3550 or [fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk).
- **If you're under pressure to have FGM performed on your daughter**, ask your GP, health visitor or other healthcare professional for help, or contact the NSPCC helpline.
- **If you've had FGM**, you can get help from a specialist NHS gynaecologist or FGM service – ask your GP, midwife or any other healthcare professional about services in your area. [Download a list of NHS FGM clinics \(PDF, 430kb\)](#).