

SCHOOLS BULLETIN | HARMFUL PRACTICES



**END VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN
AND GIRLS**

Together we can stop it

June 2019

This briefing has been designed to support schools’ understanding of the different forms of Harmful Practices, the signs to be aware of and the action that education professionals need to take to safeguard their students.

Harmful Practices are forms of violence against women and girls. As with all forms of violence against women and girls, Harmful Practices stem from gender inequality and are carried out with the aim of controlling women and girls. There are different forms of Harmful Practices, but they are all linked to cultural notions of ‘honour.’

Staff should be aware that students may be most at risk of some forms of harmful practices during the long summer holiday.

For any disclosures/ suspicions of Harmful Practices, schools should not approach the family or community leaders, share any information with them or attempt any form of mediation. Members of the local community should never be used as interpreters.

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FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)

What is it?

FGM includes any mutilation of a girl's or woman's genitals, including the partial or total removal of the external genitalia for non-medical reasons.

FGM is extremely painful and has serious health consequences, both at the time when the mutilation is carried out and in later life. Girls of all ages, including babies and toddlers, are at risk of FGM. It's estimated that over 20,000 girls under the age of 15 are at risk of FGM in the UK each year.

FGM and the law

FGM is illegal in the UK and is a form of child abuse and violence against women and girls. Under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003, it is illegal to subject, assist or perform FGM and carries a penalty of up to 14 years in prison. The Serious Crime Act 2015 includes 'extra-territorial jurisdiction' which can capture offences of FGM committed abroad by a UK national or a person who is resident in the UK.

The Serious Crime Act 2015 also created the offence of failing to protect a girl from FGM. The maximum penalty for this offence is 7 years' imprisonment or a fine or both. See [here](#) for a government factsheet about the Serious Crime Act and FGM.

Mandatory duty to report

Professionals from all agencies have a statutory responsibility to safeguard children from being abused through FGM. Since 2015, professionals in health, schools and social care have a mandatory duty to report cases of 'known' FGM in under 18s - i.e. instances which are disclosed by the victim.

Reports must be made to the police within one month of initial disclosure. Failure to comply will be dealt with via disciplinary measures. It's recommended that the police referral is made within 24 hours of disclosure. **See further guidance on the mandatory duty to report FGM [here](#).**

Signs that a girl could be at risk of FGM

- One or both of a girl's parents come from a community affected by FGM
- A girl is born to a woman who has undergone FGM
- A girl has an older sibling or cousin who has undergone FGM
- Family considers FGM integral to their cultural or religious identity
- The family indicate that there are strong levels of influence held by elders and/or elders are involved in bringing up female children
- A girl/family has limited level of integration within UK community
- A girl from a community affected by FGM is withdrawn from PSHE, Relationships and Sex Education or Health Education as a result of her parents wishing to keep her uninformed about her body, FGM, her rights.

Signs that a girl could be at immediate risk of FGM

- If a female family elder is present, particularly when she is visiting from a country of origin, and taking a more active/ influential role in the family
- If there are references to FGM in conversation, e.g. telling other children
- A girl may confide that she is to have a 'special procedure' or to attend a special occasion to 'become a woman'
- A girl may request help from a teacher or another adult if she is aware or suspects that she is at immediate risk
- Parents/ family plan to take child out of the country for prolonged period
- A girl may talk about a long holiday to a country where FGM is prevalent
- A girl is taken abroad to a country with high prevalence of FGM, especially during the summer holidays, known as the 'cutting season'

Signs that FGM has occurred

- Prolonged absence from schools
- Frequent need to go to the toilet or long break to urinate
- Urinary tract infections

From National FGM Centre guidance [here](#).

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (continued)

What schools should do

If a member of staff believes that the girl is at risk of FGM, or has already undergone FGM, you must act immediately and raise your concerns with your school's safeguarding lead. If you cannot reach your safeguarding lead, you should:

- Contact Haringey's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH):
 - Monday to Thursday 8.45am to 5pm; Friday 8.45am to 4.45pm. 020 8489 4470
 - Out of office hours, including weekends, call the Emergency Duty Team on 020 8489 0000
- Call the police on 101. **If you think a child is at immediate risk call the police on 999.**

You/ your safeguarding lead should also:

- Refer the student, with their consent, to appropriate medical help, counselling and local and national support groups.
- Ensure that safeguarding and protection is considered for any female family members.

Taken from HM Government Multi Agency Practice Guidance: FGM [here](#).

FGM Protection Order (FGMPO)

This is a civil protection order to protect victims/ potential victims of FGM. A FGMPO is a type of injunction which can forbid a person from doing certain things, e.g. performing FGM, taking a child out of the country etc. A FGMPO can also require the person named in the order to do certain things, for example, handover passports to the court, ensure attendance at school etc.

More information on FGMPOs from Rights of Women [here](#). Anyone can [apply on Gov.uk](#) if they are concerned that someone is at risk of FGM.

Further info

- [Multi-agency statutory guidance on FGM, October 2018](#)
- [Keeping Children Safe in Education, September 2018](#)
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2018\)](#)
- [National FGM Centre Factsheet on FGM, 2018](#)
- [Factsheet on FGM legislation in UK, 2018](#)
- [NSPCC Guidance: Protecting children from FGM](#)
- [World prevalence map for FGM](#)

Contacts

NSPCC FGM Helpline

Email: fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk

Telephone: 0800 028 3550

FORWARD (provide pan-London services on FGM)

Monday to Friday from 9:30 am to 5:30 pm.

Phone: +44 (0)208 960 4000, extension 1

Mobile: +44 (0)7834 168 141

Email support@forwarduk.org.uk

Website: <https://forwarduk.org.uk/>

FORWARD have produced a guide about services and support for young people who have questions/concerns re: FGM. See [here](#).

You should also contact the **Foreign and Commonwealth Office** if you know a British national who's already been taken abroad: 020 7008 1500.

Haringey VAWG services directory for professionals [here](#) lists local and national specialist services.

FORCED MARRIAGE

What is it

A forced marriage is where one or both people do not (or in cases of people with learning disabilities or reduced capacity, cannot) consent to the marriage as they are pressurised, or abuse is used, to force them to do so i.e. duress is a factor. This could include:

- Physical abuse – e.g. threats, physical violence or sexual violence
- Emotional and psychological abuse – e.g. making someone feel like they are bringing 'shame' on their family
- Financial abuse, for example taking someone's wages, may also be a factor.

Information taken from UK Government guidance on forced marriage [here](#).

Forced marriage affects a wide range of communities and can happen to anyone from any background, regardless of social class, financial status and sexuality.

A forced marriage is not the same as an arranged marriage, where both participants give their full consent and enter the marriage willingly.

Forced marriage and the law

Forcing someone to marry is a criminal offence, with a maximum penalty of 7 years' imprisonment. A Forced Marriage Protection Order (FMPO) is a court order which can prevent or pre-empt forced marriages from occurring and to protect those who have already been forced into marriage. An application for a FMPO is made at the Family Court by anyone at risk of forced marriage/or has been forced into a marriage, a 'relevant third party' (i.e. a Local Authority) or any other person who is given permission by the court.

More information about forced marriage, the law and FMPOs [here](#).

Signs/ indicators

- Absence and persistent absence.
- Request for extended leave of absence and failure to return from visits to country of origin.
- Fear about forthcoming school holidays
- Surveillance by siblings or cousins at school.
- Decline in behaviour, engagement, performance or punctuality.
- Poor exam results.
- Being withdrawn from school by those with parental responsibility.
- Removal from a day centre of a person with a physical or learning disability
- Not allowed to attend extra-curricular activities
- Sudden announcement of engagement to a stranger
- Prevented from going on to further/higher education
- Family history: Siblings forced to marry, self-harm/suicide of siblings, family disputes, running away from home, unreasonable restrictions
- Staff may become aware of a student because they appear anxious, depressed and emotionally withdrawn with low self-esteem. They may display behaviours such as self-harming or anorexia. Sometimes they may come to the attention of the police having been discovered shoplifting or taking drugs or alcohol.
- Often young people at risk of forced marriage are living in virtual imprisonment. They may be subject to excessive restrictions and control at home.
- **Students' symptoms can be exacerbated in the periods leading up to the holiday season. Staff should be particularly vigilant in that period.**

More information on the indicators of forced marriage can be found in the Government guidance [here](#), pages 32-33.

FORCED MARRIAGE (continued)

What schools should do

If you suspect a student is being forced into marriage, you should immediately refer the student to your designated safeguarding lead. It is vital that local safeguarding procedures are activated quickly. If you cannot reach your safeguarding lead, contact Haringey's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH):

- Monday to Thursday 8.45am to 5pm; Friday 8.45am to 4.45pm. 020 8489 4470
- Out of office hours, including weekends, call the Emergency Duty Team on 020 8489 0000

If you think a child is at immediate risk call the police on 999.

You should be aware of the “one chance” rule - you may only have one chance to speak to a potential victim and thus only one chance to save a life. It is vital to remember you/ your safeguarding lead will need to:

- See the student immediately in a secure and private place.
- Contact a trained forced marriage specialist as soon as possible.
- Reassure the victim about confidentiality where appropriate i.e. practitioners will not inform their family.
- Establish and agree an effective and safe method of contacting the victim, possibly using a codeword to confirm identity.
- Obtain full contact details that can be forwarded to a trained specialist.
- Establish if the student has dual nationality, they may have 2 passports.
- Where appropriate, consider the need for immediate protection and placement away from the family
- Seek advice from the Forced Marriage Unit. The FMU provides advice and support to anyone who fears they may be forced to marry.

For a more comprehensive guidance for schools read pages 30 - 35 [here](#) from the UK Government multi-agency practice guidelines.

Further info

[Keeping Children Safe in Education, September 2018](#)

[Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2018\)](#)

[Multi-agency practice guidelines: handling cases of forced marriage, 2018](#)

[London Safeguarding Children Board Forced Marriage Procedure](#)

[UK Government guidance on forced marriage](#)

[Free online safeguarding course developed with the Forced Marriage Unit of the Foreign Office](#)

The course aims to raise awareness, challenge perceptions and inform you of the actions to take if you suspect someone is at risk of forced marriage.

Contact

Forced Marriage Unit (FMU)

- Website: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/forced-marriage>
- Telephone: +44 (0) 20 7008 0151
- Email: fmufco.gov.uk
- Facebook: [Forced Marriage page](#)

Haringey VAWG services directory for professionals [here](#) lists local and national specialist services.

In November 2018, the government held a consultation about introducing a new mandatory reporting duty relating to cases of forced marriage. It has yet to announce to outcome of this consultation, but schools should be aware this duty may come into force. More information [here](#).

CRIMES COMMITTED IN THE NAME OF 'HONOUR' (ALSO KNOWN AS 'HONOUR'-BASED VIOLENCE/ ABUSE)

What is it?

Crimes committed in the name of 'honour' or 'honour'-based violence/ abuse are the terms used to describe incidents of violence, including murder ("honour killings") that have been committed in the belief that those actions will protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community. The victims are predominantly women (but men can be victims) perceived to have behaved immorally and deemed to have breached the honour code of a family and/ or community, causing shame.

A child who is at risk of 'honour'-based abuse is at significant risk of physical harm (including being murdered) and/or neglect, and may also suffer significant emotional harm through the threat of violence or witnessing violence directed towards a sibling or other family member.

Information from London Safeguarding Children Board [here](#).

There is no statutory definition of crimes committed in the name of 'honour' / 'honour'-based abuse and no specific criminal offence. Cases will be prosecuted under the offence committed e.g. assault, GBH, threats to kill etc.

Who are the perpetrators?

In most 'honour'-based abuse cases there are multiple perpetrators from the immediate family, sometimes the extended family and occasionally the community at large. Mothers, sisters, aunties and even grandmothers have been known to be involved in the conspiring of 'honour' crimes.

Information from Karma Nirvana Charity [here](#).

Who is affected?

Staff should be aware that crimes committed in the name of 'honour' cuts across all cultures and communities.

Signs/ indicators

The signs that a young person is experiencing/ at risk of crimes committed in the name of 'honour' are similar to the signs of forced marriage. A young person may be subjected to multiple harmful practices. The signs include:

- Family power structures might be very patriarchal.
- Subjected to excessive restrictions/control at home.
- Absence from school or surveillance by siblings/ cousins at school.
- Decline in behaviour, engagement, performance, punctuality, exam results.
- Being withdrawn from school by those with parental responsibility.
- Family history: Siblings forced to marry, self-harm/suicide of siblings, family disputes, running away from home, unreasonable restrictions.
- Student may appear anxious, depressed, withdrawn with low self-esteem.
- They may display behaviours such as self-harming or anorexia.
- They may come to the attention of the police because of shoplifting, taking drugs/ alcohol, involvement with gangs, missing episodes.
- Student may be 'acting out' in school as only place they have freedom.
- Young person may disclose physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, or there may be signs of physical abuse such as bruising.
- Young person may disclose that family are ashamed of her, or say she wears too much make up, is 'too Western' etc.

The perceived immoral behaviour which could precipitate a murder include:

- Inappropriate make-up or dress
- The existence of a boyfriend
- Kissing or intimacy in a public place
- Rejecting a forced marriage
- Pregnancy outside of marriage
- Being a victim of rape
- Inter-faith relationships
- Leaving a spouse or seeking divorce

Information from London Safeguarding Children Board [here](#).

CRIMES COMMITTED IN THE NAME OF 'HONOUR' (ALSO KNOWN AS 'HONOUR'-BASED VIOLENCE) (continued)

What schools should do

Where a child discloses fear of so called 'honour'-based violence, you should immediately refer the student to your designated safeguarding lead. It is vital that local safeguarding procedures are activated quickly.

If you cannot reach your safeguarding lead, you should:

- Contact the police on 101
- Contact Haringey's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH):
 - Monday to Thursday 8.45am to 5pm; Friday 8.45am to 4.45pm. 020 8489 4470
 - Out of office hours, including weekends, call the Emergency Duty Team on 020 8489 0000

If you think a child is at immediate risk call the police on 999.

You/ your school's safeguarding lead should also:

- See the child immediately, on their own, in a secure and private place
- Explain the limits of confidentiality
- Ask direct questions to gather information to make a referral. Explain that a referral to children's social care and the police will be made
- Record the child's wishes
- Develop an emergency safety plan with the child
- Agree a means of discreet future contact with the child
- Record all discussions and decisions (including rationale if no decision is made to refer to LA children's social care).

Professionals should not approach the family or community leaders, share any information with them or attempt any form of mediation. In particular, members of the local community should not be used as interpreters.

See more information from London Safeguarding Children Board [here](#).

Further info

[Keeping Children Safe in Education, September 2018](#)

[Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2018\)](#)

[Safeguarding Children Affected by Domestic Abuse Procedure](#)

[Crown Prosecution Service | Information and statistics on forced marriage and crimes committed in the name of 'honour'](#)

[Against Violence and Abuse Prevention Platform | Crimes committed in the name of 'honour'](#)

['Honour'-based Violence Awareness Network](#)

Contacts

IKWRO

Protect and promote rights of Middle Eastern and Afghan women and girls who are at risk of 'honour' based violence, forced marriage, child marriage, female genital mutilation and domestic violence.

- www.ikwro.org.uk
- 0207 920 6460

Karma Nirvana

Support for people at risk of forced marriage and 'honour'-based violence.

- www.karmanirvana.org.uk
- 0800 599 9247

Haringey VAWG services directory for professionals [here](#) lists local and national specialist services.

FAITH-BASED ABUSE

What is it

Faith-based child abuse is physical, emotional and sexual abuse, or neglect of children, linked to beliefs in five areas:

- Abuse as a result of a child being accused of being a 'witch'
- Abuse as a result of a child being accused of being possessed by 'evil spirits'
- Ritualistic abuse which is prolonged sexual, physical, psychological abuse
- Satanic abuse which is carried out in the name of 'Satan' and may have links to cults
- Any other harmful practice linked to a belief or faith

The forms of abuse that follow fall into the four main categories below:

- Physical abuse - e.g. ritualistic beating, burning, cutting, stabbing, semi-strangulating, tying up the child, or rubbing chilli peppers or other substances on the child's genitals or eyes.
- Emotional abuse - e.g. a child may not be allowed near or to share a room with family members and threatened with abandonment. The child may also be persuaded that they are possessed.
- Neglect - the child's family and community may have failed to ensure appropriate medical care, supervision, education, good hygiene, nourishment, clothing or warmth.
- Sexual abuse - Children are particularly vulnerable to sexual abusers within the family, community or faith organisation. These people exploit the belief as a form of control or threat.

Where does it happen?

Child abuse linked to faith or belief is not confined to one faith, nationality or ethnic community. Examples have been recorded worldwide across various religions including Christians, Muslims and Hindus.

Information from Metropolitan Police. More information [here](#).

Signs/indicators

Signs that a child could be at risk of abuse linked to faith or belief:

- Children who are seen as "naughty" or have challenging behaviour
- Children with disabilities including autism, epilepsy, down's syndrome, dyslexia.
- Albinos, precocious children (e.g. children who are very advanced, prematurely developed, gifted) and lefthanded children
- Children whose parents have been branded as witches
- Children living away from home in private fostering situations or in domestic servitude situations
- Children who are living within complex family structures e.g. a polygamous setting or a reconstituted family

Signs a child is undergoing abuse linked to faith or belief:

Most of the indicators may appear similar to other types of maltreatment and include when a child:

- Reports that they are or have been accused of being evil, and / or that they are having the devil beaten out of them.
- Is made to wear some form of paraphernalia that could be of a religious nature.
- Personal care deteriorates or has body marks, such as bruises or burns
- Is seen as the scapegoat for a change in family circumstances for the worse
- In a group of children is relatively powerless vis-a-vis the parents/carers, maybe a child with no essential role in the family
- Attendance at school becomes irregular, or is taken out of school altogether without another school place having been organised

Information from National FGM centre leaflet. More information [here](#).

What schools should do

Schools should follow the same safeguarding procedures as with FGM, forced marriage and crimes committed in the name of 'honour.' You should immediately refer the student to your designated safeguarding lead. It is vital that local safeguarding procedures are activated quickly.

If you cannot reach your safeguarding lead, you should:

- Call the police on 101 and ask for Project Violet. The Metropolitan Police have set up Project Violet which specifically looks at crimes relating to faith-based abuse.
- Contact Haringey's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH):
 - Monday to Thursday 8.45am to 5pm; Friday 8.45am to 4.45pm. 020 8489 4470
 - Out of office hours, including weekends, call the Emergency Duty Team on 020 8489 0000

If you think a child is at immediate risk call the police on 999.

All staff must be clear when reporting to your safeguarding lead or making a referral that:

- You are concerned the child may be a victim of abuse linked to faith and abuse
- Give the reasons why you are concerned.

You should also contact the Foreign and Commonwealth Office if the child has been taken abroad:

Telephone: 020 7008 1500

Further info

[Keeping Children Safe in Education, September 2018](#)

[Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2018\)](#)

[Leaflet from National FGM Centre about Faith-based Abuse](#)

[Information from National FGM Centre about Child Abuse linked to Faith or Belief](#)

[National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief, 2012](#)

Contact

Project Violet, Metropolitan Police

There are a number of laws in the UK that allow the prosecution of those responsible for abuse linked to faith or belief. Project Violet has been set up by the Metropolitan Police to develop prevention strategies and initiatives that can help educate and raise awareness of faith and belief-based abuse.

Project Violet is available to provide advice, support and guidance for referrals and investigations. Call 101 and ask for Project Violet.

AFRUCA (Africans Unite Against Child Abuse)

Works directly with families of African origin to support parents to keep their children safe.

- 0844 660 8607
- www.afruca.org

BREAST FLATTENING

What is it

Breast flattening, also known as breast ironing, is the process during which young pubescent girls' breasts are ironed, massaged, flattened and/or pounded down over a period of time (sometimes years) in order for the breasts to disappear or delay the development of the breasts entirely.

Breast flattening usually starts with the first signs of puberty and is usually carried out by female relatives in the victim's home.

Breast flattening is practiced in Cameroon, central Africa, and has been reported in other African countries including Guinea-Bissau, Chad, Togo, Benin and Guinea, according to the UN. **Staff should be aware that this practice does take place within the UK.**

Why does it happen?

It's believed that breast flattening will protect girls from male attention, sexual harassment and rape, and prevent dishonour being brought on the family, e.g. if a girl were to have sex outside of marriage or get pregnant.

Prevalence

Breast flattening is an underreported crime and an emerging issue in the UK. Came Women and Girls Development Organisation ([Cawogido](#)) estimate that at least 1,000 women/ girls in the UK have been subjected.

What schools should do

Breast flattening is a form of child abuse. Schools should follow the same safeguarding procedures as with FGM, forced marriage, crimes committed in the name of 'honour' and faith-based abuse. See guidance in this briefing.

If a child is in immediate danger, call the police on 999.

Signs that a girl could be at risk

- A girl is embarrassed about her body
- A girl is born to a woman who has undergone breast flattening
- A girl has an older sibling or cousin who has undergone breast flattening
- References to breast flattening in conversation
- A girl may request help from a teacher or another adult if she is aware or suspects that she is at immediate risk
- A girl from an affected community is withdrawn from PSHE, Relationships and Sex Education or Health Education as her parents wish to keep her uninformed about her rights/ her body.
- One or both parents or elder family members consider breast flattening integral to their cultural identity.
- Family indicate that there are strong levels of influence held by elders who are involved in bringing up children and support breast flattening.

Signs that breast flattening has occurred

- A girl may disclose to a teacher, social worker, GP or another medical professional
- Some girls may ask for help, perhaps talk about pain or discomfort in their chest area, but may not be explicit about the problem due to embarrassment or fear
- A girl may display reluctance to undergo medical examination
- A girl may be fearful of changing for physical activities due to scars showing or bandages being visible

Information from National FGM Centre leaflet [here](#).

Further info

- [National FGM Centre leaflet on breast flattening](#)
- Animated video about breast flattening by National FGM Centre [here](#).