FORWARD

Safeguarding rights & dignity

FORWARD's vision is; A world where women and girls live in dignity, are healthy, have choices and equal opportunities.

Picture courtesy of forwarduk.org.uk/

What is FGM?

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a destructive operation, during which the female genitals are partly or entirely removed or injured with the aim of inhibiting a woman's sexual feelings (FORWARD, 2019).

FGM is kept in existence by families in the name of culture, tradition and religion (Dorenko, et al., 2007).

Forward work with partners in the UK, Europe and Africa to tackle these practices that affect the dignity and well-being of females.

Its aim is to safeguard girls at risk, and support women who are affected.

They also focus on other issues that affect females, such as child marriage and obstetric fistula (FORWARD, 2019).

Who are affected?

200 million females are affected worldwide.

3 million are at risk in Africa and;

24,000 girls in the UK are at high risk of FGM (under the age of 15) (FORWARD, 2019).

Using community engagement and government lobbying, the aim of FORWARD is to enable African women to gain the skills and confidence to become advocates for change!

Impact

In the UK, the practice of FGM is referenced in the UK Children Act, in addition to other legislation (Dorenko, et al., 2007).

In 2014 alone, FORWARD reached **3,500** young people and school staff in the UK through a ground breaking Schools FGM awareness Programme.

The programme delivers a range of holistic services to schools including staff training, student awareness sessions, parental engagement, outreach and support (Khalifa & Brown , 2016).

To date…

On 28th February 2019, the Department of Education announced its guidelines on new sex education classes to ensure secondary schools address the emotional and physical effects of FGM.

However, FORWARD have raised concerns that these guidelines restrict providing awareness to secondary level only (Reid, 2019).

Limitations

- Authorities rarely intervene.
- Governments ignore FGM.
- Not an excuse for asylum.
- Figures may not be accurate as some groups may be reluctant to participate in studies because of concerns about residence status or who may not be living in a conventional or legal dwelling (Desert Flower, Unknown).

The Law

The practice is an international problem. The UK government has attempted to discourage FGM by passing a law in 2003 to prevent FGM in the UK (Dorenko, et al., 2007).

Data used to support policies has at its best been estimated.

The lack of data makes it extremely difficult for policy makers to respond effectively (Dorenko, et al., 2007).

However, in February 2019, the UK saw its first conviction for FGM 0 the mother of a 3 year old girl (Reid, 2019).

France

In France, there have been more than 100 prosecutions of families, mainly because there are routine physical examinations of girls.

As this opens up ethical questions around protecting and maintaining the dignity of girls, it is said to be a controversial way to end FGM (FORWARD, 2017).

Study Findings

In 2007, a study was carried out to estimate the prevalence of FGM in England and Wales.

Findings suggest that FGM violates human rights and females and it is an international problem (Dorenko, et al., 2007).

FORWARD support the planning and implementation of a comprehensive national strategy in the UK that will help to speed up the efforts to end FGM within a generation.

MYTH:	FACT:
An uncut woman will become promiscuous and have an uncontrollable sexual appetite.	FGM makes no difference to a woman's sexual appetite but can stop her from enjoying sex. Sexual appetite mainly arises from hormones secreted by glands in the brain.
If the clitoris is not cut, it will continue to grow.	The clitoris stops growing after puberty and is still small at the final stage of growth.
If the clitoris is not cut, it will harm her husband during intercourse.	The clitoris gives a woman sexual pleasure and does not cause any harm to her or her husband.
If the clitoris is not cut, it will harm the baby during delivery.	The clitoris causes no harm to the foetus, the baby or the mother, whereas FGM may cause serious complications during childbirth.
If a woman does not undergo FGM, she will not be able to have children.	FGM has nothing to do with fertility; and FGM may actually cause infertility because of infections.
If a woman does not undergo FGM, her genitals will smell.	FGM will not make the vagina any cleaner. In fact, Type 3 FGM can make the vagina less hygienic.

(Forward UK, 2014)

What are FORWARD doing?

- Awareness raising and prevention work.
- Supporting engagement and relationships.
- Providing advice and consultation.
- Training professionals – midwives, gynaecologists, school staff.
- School support problems.

Conclusion

- Forward are proud to be an African women-led organisation with their hearts firmly within the community.
- They are known as the ‘go-to’ organisation for African women’s issues, mainly FGM.
- They are unashamed in their fight to bring issue facing African women to the forefront and take a lead in tackling them (FORWARD, 2019)

The Goal…

- To educate individuals and communities to bring about their change and share it with others.
- Train statutory agencies and other organisations to respond effectively to the need of women and young girls.
- Support networking, sharing of resources and collaborative working at European level to accelerate action to end FGM in Europe (EndFGM, 2019).

References

- Desert Flower, Unknown. *What is FGM?.* [Online]
  Available at: https://www.desertflowerfoundation.org/en/what-is-fgm.html
  [Accessed 12th March 2019].
- Dorenko, E., Morison, L. & Macfarlane, A., 2007. *A Statistical Study to Estimate the Prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation in England and Wales,* London: Foundation for Women's Health, Research and Development (FORWARD).
- EndFGM, 2019. *FORWARD - Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development.* [Online]
  Available at: http://www.endfgm.eu/partnerships/forward-foundation-for-womens-health-research-and-development/
  [Accessed March 12th 2019].
- Forward UK, 2014. *Female Genital Mutilation: Frequently Asked Questions: A Campaigner's Guide for Young People.* [Online]
  Available at: https://forwarduk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Forward_-FGM-FAQ.pdf
  [Accessed 12th March 2016].
- FORWARD, 2017. *Female Genital Mutilation Frequently Asked Questions:A Campaigner's Guide for Young People.* [Online]
  Available at: https://forwarduk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Forward-FAQ-August-2017-Web.pdf
  [Accessed 18th March 2019].
- FORWARD, 2019. *About Us.* [Online]
  Available at: https://forwarduk.org.uk/about
  [Accessed 12th March 2019].

References

- FORWARD, 2019. *FGM.* [Online]
  Available at: https://forwarduk.org.uk/key-issues/fgm/
  [Accessed 12th March 2019].
- FORWARD, 2019. *Key Issues.* [Online]
  Available at: https://forwarduk.org.uk/key-issues/
  [Accessed 12th March 2019].
- Khalifa, S. & Brown , E., 2016. *Communities Tackling Female Genital Mutilation in the UK: Best Practice Guide,* London: the Tackling Female Genital Mutilation Initiative.
- Reid, N., 2019. *New guidelines to make FGM education in secondary schools inadequate.* [Online]
  Available at: https://forwarduk.org.uk/Press-Release-New-guidelines-to-make-FGM-education-in-secondary-schools-inadequate-28022019.pdf
  [Accessed 18th March 2019].
- Reid, N., 2019. *Press Release: FGM Prosecution Highlights Major Gaps in Safeguarding Girls in the UK.* [Online]
  Available at: https://forwarduk.org.uk/press-release-fgm-prosecution-highlights-major-gaps-in-safeguarding-girls-in-the-uk/
  [Accessed 12th March 2019].