

Charges over genital mutilation of girls in Australia

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Many cases of female genital mutilation likely go unreported in Australia, a state minister said Friday after four people were charged over the alleged circumcision of two girls aged 6 and 7.

Two men and two women were charged on Thursday over their involvement in the alleged mutilation of the girls in Sydney homes over the past 18 months.

New South Wales state Minister for Family and Community Services Pru Goward said the practice was difficult to detect.

"The pretext that is often used is that it's a religious custom, and it wouldn't be the first time that religion has been used to mutilate or damage women," she told ABC radio.

Goward said it was likely that many cases in [New South Wales](#), the country's most populous state, went unreported.

"It's just anyone's guess," she said.

"We have probably got the most diversified community in Australia and many of them are from countries where this is practised."

A 68-year-old retired female nurse who allegedly carried out the offences was charged in what is thought to be the first time that anyone has faced the law over the offence since legislation was introduced in

NSW in 1994.

A 56-year-old Sydney sheik, reportedly from a community that follows the Dawoodi Bohra sub-sect of Islam, was charged with being an accessory after the fact and of hindering the police investigation.

Two other people, a man and a woman, were also charged. Police would not say whether they were the [girls'](#) parents.

Police, who were alerted after an anonymous tip-off, have alleged that the mutilation was done for cultural reasons.

"The children are still with their parents. I can stress that, despite this procedure, they are good parents," Detective Superintendent John Kerlatec told reporters.

"Contradictory as it may sound, it's a procedure that they believe in their own culture is appropriate."

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