

# Reporting all FGM in the UK as child abuse may not be the best way to reduce prevalence

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The mandatory reporting of female genital mutilation (FGM) as child abuse may not be the most appropriate first measure to reduce FGM in the UK and instead a multifaceted approach of training health workers, educating at-risk woman about FGM and incorporating mandatory screening for FGM risk factors during antenatal care may be more effective according to Maria Luisa Amasanti, from the Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust, UK, and colleagues in an Essay published in this week's *PLOS Medicine*.

FGM has been illegal in the UK since 1985 and since 2003 anyone found guilty of an offence under the Female Genital Mutilation Act is liable to a prison sentence of up to 14 years. In 2015 it became a mandatory requirement to report visually confirmed or verbally disclosed cases of FGM in girls under 18 in England and Wales to the police.

The authors note, "[m]andatory data recording is a useful intervention as it will provide us with more accurate information, enabling more informed decisions to be made and acted upon [...] Mandatory reporting of all FGM as [child abuse](#) is a point of contention with hugely disparate opinions about whether this would be an effective solution. There is a fear by some public bodies that mandatory reporting of FGM as child abuse and the threat of prosecution could potentially drive the problem of FGM even further underground."

The authors conclude, "we believe that the three-step approach of (1)

educating [health workers](#), (2) educating women and girls at risk, and (3) incorporating mandatory antenatal screening is an effective approach that is compassionate. These are proactive steps that rely heavily upon awareness and training, along with the correct documentation and communication flowing from antenatal care to obstetric care to postpartum care to GP care. This is where the role of health workers comes to the fore and where we can make a positive change."

**More information:** Maria Luisa Amasanti et al. Compassionate and Proactive Interventions by Health Workers in the United Kingdom: A Better Approach to Prevent and Respond to Female Genital Mutilation?, *PLOS Medicine* (2016). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1001982](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1001982)

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