

Study findings could help prevent female genital mutilation in U.K., researchers say

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Researchers from the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) and City University London say the findings of a study on female genital mutilation could help prevent the practise in the UK.

The study led by Dr Aida Abzhaparova (UWE Bristol) and Professor Debra Salmon (City University London) was based on a survey and focus groups with members of affected communities across Bristol.

Groups of mothers, fathers and young people took part in a series of events, discussing the effectiveness and impact of national [public health](#) messages aimed at eradicating FGM.

Participants highlighted not only visible aspects of campaigns but areas not previously discussed. This included the stigma and stereotyping, attached to targeting communities with anti-FGM messages, in particular the role of men in ending the practice. Participants also highlighted the negative implications of using criminalisation as a central focus of campaigns rather than concentration on education or the empowerment of girls and women.

Criminalisation was thought to encourage the practice to go underground, preventing the identification of girls at risk or encouraging communities to discuss how to end the practice. Participants raised questions about where authority lies in terms of ending the practice, the role of affected communities themselves and shaping future messages within campaign strategies to increase their effectiveness.

The findings of the study have resulted in a number of key recommendations:

- To increase attention on already existing efforts of members of affected communities in tackling FGM locally within campaign messaging
- To work directly with communities to develop appropriate public health messages and strategies
- To recognise the broader debates about the role of women and girls, that does not alienate or stigmatise men within affected communities and identify opportunities to harnesses their support.
- To think more carefully about spatial context in which targeted population are exposed to messages and how the messages are understood by wider society

Dr Aida Abzhaparova, a Senior Lecturer in International Relations, said: "FGM takes place in private, yet it is discussed, debated and criticised in public. We aim to demonstrate how our research, informed by the members of affected communities, can help to bridge the gap between public and personal spaces. Our study concerns itself with how FGM can be successfully eradicated and abolished without negative impacts on the wider public health, of the individual and the wider community."

Debra Salmon, Professor of Community Health at City University London, said: "Our work has revealed a number of key findings and recommendations that we can use to help prevent the practice of FGM. By raising and addressing challenging, sensitive, yet important issues about how to tackle FGM without causing insecurities in those who are targeted we hope that our findings will have a real impact on British public health practice by employing community informed national campaigns in eradicating FGM. By speaking to all groups of people, and not just affected women, we hope our work can benefit members of

affected communities, frontline professionals and the broader public."

A public engagement event entitled 'Tackling Female Genital Mutilation and the Voices of Affected Communities' was held at the Watershed media centre in Bristol on Tuesday to discuss the research findings.

Among those in attendance at the event was Marvin Rees, the newly elected Mayor of Bristol.

He said: "Having University research that assesses the effectiveness of our campaigns to eliminate FGM is essential. We must have an evidence base for what works and what does not. I was struck by the suggestion that working with the community for a cultural shift was felt by respondents to be the most effective intervention. Of course we must continue to enforce the law - FGM is illegal and this must be understood. However, the campaign requires education and behaviour change that cannot be delivered through prosecution alone."

Provided by University of the West of England

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