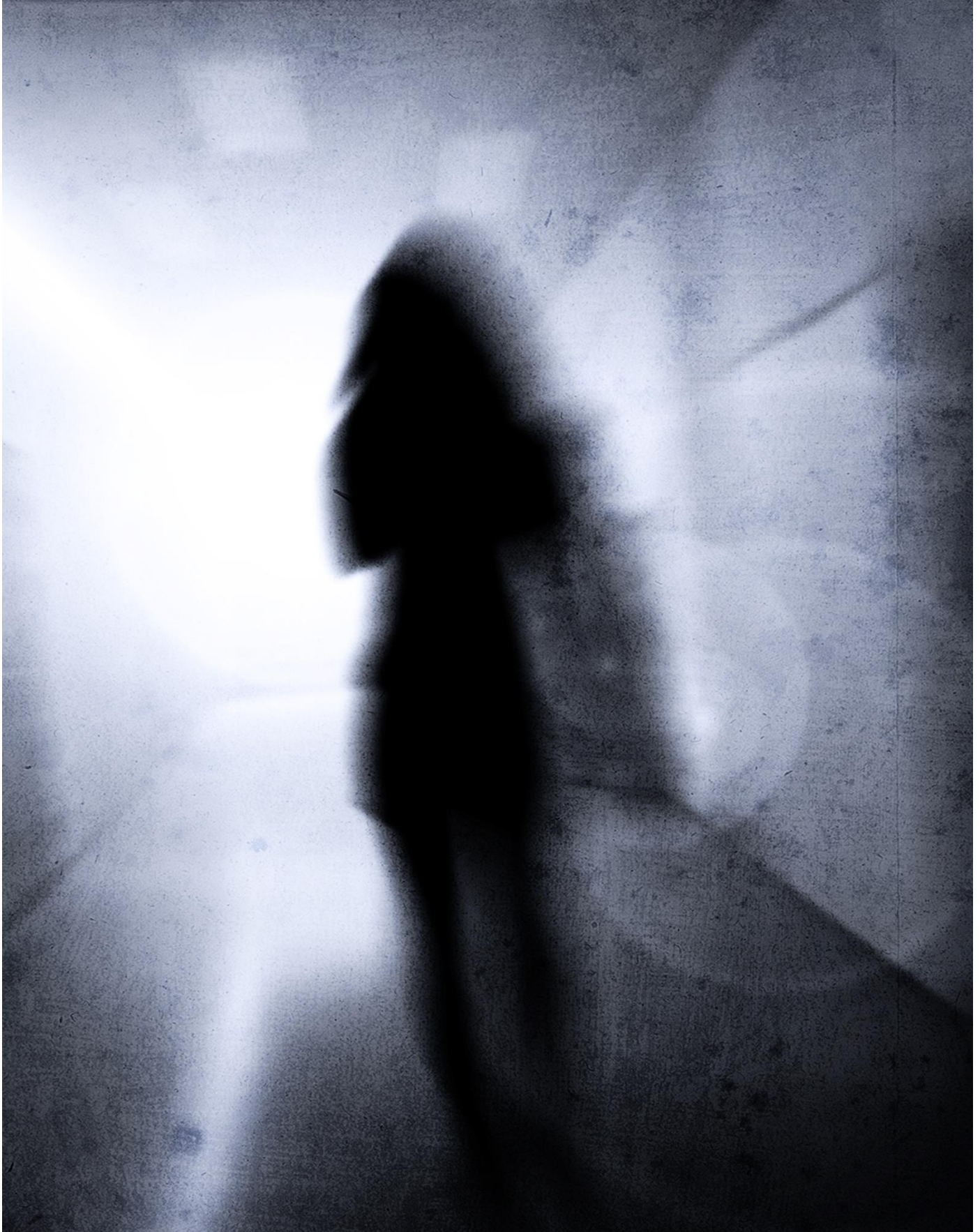


FGM: more awareness for more action

Resolution Shortlist Briefing Notes

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INSPIRING WOMEN



FGM: more awareness for more action

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) has been illegal in the UK for over 30 years and the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 made it illegal to aid, abet or procure the carrying out of FGM abroad. However, there have been no successful prosecutions of those involved. The NFWI calls on the government to improve efforts to measure and disclose the prevalence of FGM in the UK and to take further action to help secure more successful prosecutions of those involved in this abusive practice and thereby advance the health of women who have suffered or may be at risk of suffering FGM.

Proposer's position

The proposer is concerned that FGM is a continuing problem in the UK, with girls being subject to it within the country and also taken abroad to have it done as well.

Despite it being illegal to perform FGM, and illegal to aid, abet or procure the carrying out of FGM abroad, there have been no successful prosecutions in the UK.

The proposer would like to see the government do more to facilitate successful prosecutions, and improve efforts to measure the prevalence of FGM in the UK.

What is FGM?

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines female genital mutilation as “all procedures involving the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

International bodies such as the United Nations and the WHO are unanimous that FGM has no health benefits and leads to short- and long-term physical and psychological harm.

Though no religious scripts prescribe it, a common reason given for FGM is religion. However, religious leaders take different positions on the practice, some promote it, some consider it irrelevant to religion and others contribute to its elimination. In some cultures FGM is seen as a rite of passage and a prerequisite for marriage. It can be promoted to ensure women adhere to considered acceptable sexual behaviour or to try and ensure premarital virginity.

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World Health Organization (WHO) definition of FGM

The scale of the problem

It has been estimated that more than 200 million women worldwide have been subjected to FGM and three million girls are believed to be at risk each year. FGM is practised in more than 29 African countries, and across the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula and along the Persian Gulf.

In the UK, it is estimated that 137,000 women and girls are living with the effects of FGM, although many of these women are likely to have undergone the practice before entering the UK. Precise data on the incidence of FGM in the UK is not available, despite efforts by the government to improve evidence collection.

In 2014 the government introduced mandatory reporting requirements for frontline health and social care professionals. This reporting shows that FGM is a problem in the UK, but a lack of consistent reporting means this data does not show the whole picture.

The current situation in the UK

FGM has been illegal in the UK since 1985, and since 2003 it has been illegal to aid, abet or procure the carrying out of FGM abroad. It took 29 years before the first prosecution was brought to trial and the defendants were found not guilty.

The Government has made significant efforts to raise the profile of the dangers of FGM and to identify ways to eradicate it within a generation. In July 2014, the then Prime Minister, Rt Hon David Cameron MP, hosted the UK's first ever Girl Summit. At the Summit, the Government announced a range of measures to help eradicate FGM which have now been implemented. These included lifelong anonymity for survivors, legislation to enable parents to be prosecuted if they failed to prevent their daughter being cut, FGM Prevention Orders and a specialist FGM Unit

to identify and respond to FGM.

In an effort to increase the available data on the prevalence of FGM, the Department of Health introduced mandatory reporting requirements for health and social care professionals. This has had limited success, with many reports incomplete, and some clinicians ignoring the requirement

Need for more action

The Home Affairs Committee released a report in September 2016 looking at progress on tackling FGM in the UK. They found it unbelievable that there hadn't yet been a successful prosecution and that this would deter victims brave enough to come forward. They also found a paucity of good data on the prevalence of FGM, a fact that was undermining efforts to eradicate it.

The report recommended that the government focus more effort into developing a data driven approach to eradicating FGM, that they co-ordinate more with border police to stop people taking girls abroad to perform FGM and that frontline agencies face tougher sanctions for not reporting incidence of FGM.

Whilst there have been no successful prosecutions yet, the measures introduced by the government in 2014, once bedded in, should lead to successful prosecutions in the future



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How could the WI work on this resolution if it was passed?

A full campaign plan would be developed by the NFWI if the resolution is passed, taking into account latest developments. In the mean time, to help inform your discussions, here are some ways the WI could consider working on this issue if it was passed.

At a national level the WI could...

The NFWI could partner with national organisations and charities to work together on the campaign. Together we could highlight to the government the strength of opinion of WI members and hold them to account.

Federations could...

At the federation level members can host regional events, workshops, talks or exhibitions. This would bring together WI members and the public to learn more about this issue and raise awareness of it. The awareness campaign could be aimed at frontline health and social care staff to highlight their FGM reporting requirements.

At a local level WIs could...

WIs could invite speakers on the issue to learn more about FGM and the barriers to eliminating it in the UK. Politicians could be invited to meetings to be held to account and persuaded into action. WIs could also raise awareness of the issue, pushing it back onto the policy agenda in this country.

Arguments for the resolution

- WI members are well placed to talk about FGM as it is an issue that directly affects women and girls.
- WI members have been concerned about FGM for years, with some WIs raising awareness of the issue in their local area and calls for the WI to take it on as a campaign as far back as the 1970s. This resolution would give the NFWI a mandate to work on this issue until it is eradicated.
- This issue has dropped off the political and public agenda since the Girls Summit in 2014. A WI campaign would give action a renewed boost and allow the public to get behind a push to ensure that successful prosecutions are brought and the practice is eradicated.



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Arguments against the resolution



- The UK government implemented a range of new measures to tackle FGM in 2014. Whilst there are concerns about some of these measures and there are further measures that can be taken, it is too early to see how successful these initial actions will be. They potentially could lead to a raft of prosecutions, and limit the scope of this resolution.
- Compared to the worldwide figure of 200 million women, the 137,000 women in the UK who have been subject to FGM is relatively small. Given that eradicating FGM requires eradicating it worldwide, is a narrow focus on the UK the best use of a WI resolution?

Further information

Daughters of Eve: Daughters of Eve is a non profit organisation that works to protect girls and young women who are at risk from female genital mutilation (FGM). www.dofeve.org

FORWARD (Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development) is a women's campaign organisation committed to safeguarding the rights of African girls and women. <http://forwarduk.org.uk/>

A video outlining the key points raised in this briefing has been produced by the NHS and can be found at: <http://www.nhs.uk/video/pages/female-genital-mutilation.aspx>

Public Affairs Department contacts

If you have any questions about the resolutions or the resolutions process then please get in touch with the NFWI public affairs department:

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