

FGM: more than 1,700 women and girls treated by NHS since April

Public health minister heralds data collection on female genital mutilation as 'major milestone' on road to ending FGM in the UK

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FGM campaigner Jaha Dukureh at this year's Girl Summit in London. Photograph: Christian Sinibaldi/Guardian

More than 1,700 women and girls who have undergone female genital mutilation have been treated by the NHS since April, according to the first official figures to be published on the numbers of FGM cases seen by hospitals in England.

The data, part of a wide-ranging government package to eradicate FGM on British soil, reveals that 467 previously unknown genital mutilation survivors were treated at acute NHS trusts in England in September alone.

Campaigners say such information is a crucial tool in preventing FGM in the UK and in ensuring that victims receive the treatment and support they need.

The public health minister, Jane Ellison, who pushed for the data to be collected, hailed the move. "We know FGM devastates lives but understanding the scale of the problem is essential to tackling it effectively," she said.

"That is why, for the first time ever, hospitals are reporting information on FGM – a major milestone on the road to ending FGM in one generation here in the UK. This data will help us care for women who have had FGM, and prevent more girls from having to suffer this

traumatic experience.”

In recent months there has been a major push to end FGM in the UK, with high-profile campaigns capturing public attention. In February, a Guardian-backed petition launched by a 17-year-old schoolgirl, Fahma Mohamed, was launched on Change.org. It called for more information about FGM to be taught at schools and attracted more than 230,000 signatures as well as the backing of the [UN secretary general, Ban Ki-moon](#), and Malala Yousafzai, the [Nobel peace prize recipient](#).

At the international Girl Summit in July, the British government promised more aid to help countries combat FGM, while announcing plans to [prosecute parents who allowed their daughters to be mutilated](#) as well as the creation of an FGM unit.

An estimated 137,000 women and girls in England and Wales are affected by FGM, according to a study by [Equality Now and City University](#), released in July.

[The World Health Organisation estimates that up to 140 million girls and women have been subjected to FGM](#), a traditional practice designed to curb sexuality that involves the partial or total removal of the outer sexual organs. The procedure can cause lifelong physical and psychological complications.

“Having accurate data about this crime is an important step in helping prevent its occurrence,” said Kingsley Manning, chair of the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC), which published the data.

“The information will support the Department of Health in its FGM prevention programme, and we hope to expand the data set over time, so that it provides a more complete picture across a wider variety of care settings.”

Of the 160 acute hospital trusts in England, 125 returned data for September. An HSCIC spokeswoman said the information was mandatory and it expected that all trusts would soon be providing regular data on FGM prevalence.

Mary Wandia, FGM programme manager at Equality Now, described the data collection as a step in the right direction. “It is great news that

the NHS is starting to gather this much-needed information,” she said. “What we need now is for healthcare professionals to receive adequate training to ensure that girls at risk are protected and for care and support to be given to girls and women who are living with the consequences of FGM”

Tanya Barron, chief executive of Plan UK, a global children’s charity, said ending FGM in the UK would only be possible if it was also tackled worldwide. “While ensuring protection and prevention policies are in place in the UK is vital, it is the long-term, grassroots work in communities around the world which will prevent FGM happening in the first place,” she said. “Which means that in the battle to end harmful practices like FGM, mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, teachers, nurses – everyone has a part to play.”