

PRESS RELEASE

PAULA BRADSHAW MLA OFFICIALLY LAUNCHES REPORT ON FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM) IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The African and Caribbean Support Organisation Northern Ireland (ACSONI) in collaboration with various grassroots community groups and FGM advocacy groups are hosting the launch of a scoping study into the current state of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) locally.

The research was commissioned by ACSONI and undertaken by a team of researchers from the Ulster University led by Dr Fiona Bloomer. This project was carried out with funding from Rosa Foundation UK.

The launch takes place in the Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings, at Stormont on Tuesday, 7th November 2017 at 3PM and will be opened by South Belfast MLA, Paula Bradshaw.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that approximately 140 million women and girls globally have experienced the procedure and a further 30 million are at risk over the next decade. FGM can have detrimental lifelong health consequences including chronic infections; severe pain, childbirth complications; psychological trauma, and in some cases even death. The practice of FGM is documented in 30 countries in Africa and around the globe including the Middle East, Asia, Europe, North America, South America and Australia (WHO, 2016).

Within the UK, the NHS estimates that approximately 137,000 women and girls are affected by FGM and within Ireland, AkiDwA have calculated that roughly 3,780 have undergone FGM (AkiDwA, 2016). However, to date no specific data or estimates have been published on the number of women and girls affected within Northern Ireland. Female Genital Mutilation Protection Orders (FGMPOs) are now available in Northern Ireland. The NI Executive has shown a commitment towards eradicating FGM by publishing a Multi-Agency Practice Guidelines for frontline professionals who are responsible for safeguarding children and protecting adults from such abuse.

Quote: Paula Bradshaw MLA said: *"I am pleased to welcome ACSONI to Stormont and to raise awareness of this extremely important report.*

"The outgoing Northern Ireland Executive had taken the goal of eradicating FGM seriously and it is essential that it is more widely known about. I trust this event will be the next stage in achieving this."

Joseph Ricketts - Manager of the African & Caribbean Support Organisation NI (ACSONI) commented; *Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is considered as child abuse and a harmful practice with devastating health consequences for girls and women. It is imperative that information is distributed widely to enable those at risk to be supported and safeguards put in place to end such practices. We encourage genuine, open conversations and joined-up inter-agency work with grassroots communities at the helm to achieve good practice in tackling FGM locally".*

Dr Fiona Bloomer - Lead Researcher & Lecturer in Social Policy at Ulster University added: *"This study has identified a series of key issues in relation to FGM in Northern Ireland. Whilst significant progress has been made, for instance in developing and publishing multi-*

agency guidelines, the research found that there was no clear implementation plan for the guidelines and the absence of a departmental body to lead on this suggested to stakeholders that this issue was not being taken seriously by government. The research demonstrates that women from the communities affected by FGM want to engage on this issue but the absence of adequate support is hampering this. "

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- Section 73 of the Serious Crime Act 2015, which extends to Northern Ireland, provides for the insertion of a new Schedule 2 into the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003. The commencement date for the new Schedule which provides for the making of FGMPOs was 17 July 2015.

Community Engagement

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Sahra Mahamuud (ACSONI /Somali Community)
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