

Appendix A

Emerging findings from Opcit research

What is sustainable about the Shared Services FGM project model?

- The project operates on an interventionist model by linking women who have experienced FGM with social workers, providing advice and support to professionals and an avenue for support to women who have experienced FGM, beyond health and ante-natal care. It provides a direct line of communication and engagement between social work professionals and communities in which FGM is practiced.
- The FGM model positions social workers as a source of early help within the framework of child welfare – a difficult characteristic to achieve despite being attempted nationally.
- The project uses woman-centred community engagement to achieve outcomes.
- The project includes creating a positive experience for families who in many instances have never previously engaged with statutory services, and builds their confidence to access the health and psychological support that they need.
- Many women who have been supported have been socially isolated. They have never received support or counseling for FGM.
- There has been positive joint working between the specialist social workers and their colleagues in Midaye and Ashiana to gain women's trust. Additionally, social workers are well placed to broker access to support services and, potentially, give credibility to the message that FGM is illegal and actionable.
- Business processes are in negotiation to facilitate automatic referral from the FGM clinics or midwifery to the duty team and from there to the specialist FGM social worker. The pilot has encouraged the development of such solutions, which are slightly different in each pilot area and there appears to be potential for such practices to become embedded and 'mainstreamed'.
- The project has created new avenues for identifying and addressing risk within the community by engaging with education providers which are the places most likely to pick up on risk of FGM outside of an ante-natal health setting.

Emerging potential impacts:

- It is reported that amongst health and care services there was insufficient awareness of the resources or an understanding of what actions should be taken when FGM is identified as a risk. Following the pilot, these routes are clearer: all FGM cases identified should be referred to the FGM social worker. The project has created a clear pathway for referral.
- The knowledge that there are dedicated professionals available in itself raises the awareness level. The FGM social workers are able to inform other professionals about the impact of FGM on other presenting factors including other mental and physical health conditions related to FGM.
- Many women that have been supported have spoken of the value of being provided emotional and advocacy support which has allowed them to develop a voice in decisions about FGM.

- Basing the model firmly within the social work context encourages continued engagement and this is done within the context of an offer of support rather than in an adversarial or threatening way.
- The continuation of the pilot will provide opportunity to address important questions such as: how professionals can work with families that are hostile to intervention (and therefore, potentially at greater risk), and how to engage at risk cases where there is no health intervention route (i.e in schools).

Apart from the increase in referrals which this project has produced one of its major successes is the increased understanding about the complexity of FGM – this is enabling us as a service to develop more effective methods of assessing future risk to children.

The learning from this innovation project was presented to a pan-London audience at a conference chaired by Stephen Greenhalgh, Deputy Mayor of London on 1st February 2016. The Deputy Mayor attended a visit with the project delivery team and met a group of students at St Marylebone School to discuss what they have learned about FGM during the awareness raising sessions that has been undertaken with them.