



# UK healthcare inequalities report



HOUSE OF LORDS

*Sponsored by* Baroness Rosel Marie Boycott | 23rd May, 2023



The Vavengers; a charity committed to ending FGM/C and all other forms of Gender-Based Violence.

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# The problem

## **TRIGGER WARNING**

**The following post contains graphic images  
that may be disturbing  
to viewers.**

**Viewer discretion is advised.**

# Types of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C)



Type 1



Type 2



Type 3



Type 4

# Health risks caused by FGM/C

- constant pain
- pain and difficulty having sex
- repeated infections, which can lead to infertility
- bleeding, cysts and abscesses
- problems peeing or holding pee in (incontinence)
- psychological damage
- depression, flashbacks and self-harm
- problems during labour and childbirth, which can be life threatening for mother and baby

Some girls die from blood loss or infection as a direct result of cutting.



# Data Poverty

The UK is suffering from FGM/C data poverty. Without accurate data, key decision-makers and support providers are unable to reach survivors, provide meaningful services, nor end this form of abuse for good.

The One Question Campaign was created by The Vavengers to demonstrate the easily implemented solution to our data poverty.



**1**

An estimated 137,000 women and girls live with FGM/C in England and Wales and a further 60,000 girls are at risk

**2**

However this figure is likely far higher

**3**

Cases are often only detected during a physical examination and usually during pregnancy

**4**

When cases go undetected, countless women and girls do not receive the support and care they need

**5**

Between 2019 and 2020, 6,590 cases were identified in the UK during an NHS appointment

**6**

The average age of survivors identified was 32 years old, and 98% of them cited that the abuse had occurred at least ten years prior

# Most survivors have lived silently with FGM/C for a large part of their adult lives

Currently, a woman will only be asked verbally if she has been subjected to FGM/C, and only if a healthcare professional suspects something, or feels there is a reason to do so. This may be based on findings from a physical examination or from information provided by the patient.

More than half of the survivors we work with reported not being asked this question, and a further 72% reported that they had never received healthcare support because of FGM/C.

Asking a woman or girl if they have been subjected to FGM/C is not a routine nor standardised practice in the UK.

# The solution

# We have 3 recommendations:

## 1. Ask One Question

Add the one question “Have you been subjected to FGM/C?” to our national database and all patient forms across GPs, healthcare clinics and A&E check in points.

## 2. Make reconstructive surgery available under the NHS

UK to catch up to exemplary inclusive healthcare for survivors provided by a number of European countries by providing the option of reconstructive surgery for FGM/C survivors.

## 3. Offer sustained mental health services to FGM/C survivors

FGM/C is a lifelong trauma. We need FGM/C survivors in the UK to feel included in the mental health system and receive sustained mental health support tailored to their specific needs.

1.

Ask one question



## Hoda Ali

Founding Trustee

Hoda is the Co-founder and Trustee of The Vavengers, sexual health nurse, activist, educator, public speaker and safeguarding specialist.

Hoda is committed to ending FGM/C as a survivor & activist and talks about social injustice and inequalities survivors of abuse face.

Visit Hoda's website at [www.hodamali.com](http://www.hodamali.com)



ONE  
QUESTION  
CAMPAIGN

## One question in practice

In 2015, a data collection scheme was rolled out at North West NHS Trust London, led by *The Vavengers* Co-founder Hoda Ali and Activist Aissa Edon (both survivors) to address the Trust's lack of data on the scale of FGM/C. All female patients were invited to fill out a simple, confidential form, without a confronting conversation or traumatic consultation. This was conducted during primary and urgent healthcare visits.

The tick-box format ensured every woman was asked, no one was racially profiled, and any assumptions based on the patient's background were eliminated.

“It took 5 minutes to  
add to the form to make  
a lifetime of impact”

Hoda Ali



## Medical history

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Please put an **X** next to all those *that apply or have ever applied to you.*

I use a form of contraception

I have been subjected to Female Genital Mutilation

I have a mental health illness

I have high blood pressure

I have Rheumatoid Arthritis

# The results

## North West NHS Trust London

- Retrieved significant data on FGM/C, previously unattained by any other organisation
- Implemented as a permanent policy in the hospital's safeguarding programme
- The one question continues to be asked in patient forms





Dr Leyla Hussein OBE 'What if you knew' campaign - The Vavengers 2021

2.

Sustained mental  
health support  
for survivors



## Dr Leyla Hussein OBE

Dr. Leyla Hussein is a psychotherapist, an award-winning international campaigner leading the fight against Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) and a global leader on gender rights.

She currently works as the Global Advocacy Director and Deputy Team Leader for the Africa-led Movement to End FGM, is Rector at the University of St Andrews and an Advisory Board Member to The Vavengers.

Visit Leyla's website at: [www.leylahussein.co.uk](http://www.leylahussein.co.uk)

3.

# Reconstructive surgery for survivors

# Treatment for survivors in the UK



At present, survivors of FGM/C in the UK are offered just one surgical treatment: deinfibulation. Deinfibulation refers to a surgery performed to “open up the vagina if necessary”. (NHS)

The surgery is sometimes known as a reversal, although this name is misleading as the procedure does not replace any removed tissue nor will it undo the damage caused.

The surgery is most commonly performed on pregnant women to reduce the risks caused by FGM/C during labour.



## Dr Jasmine Abdulcadir MD PD FECSM

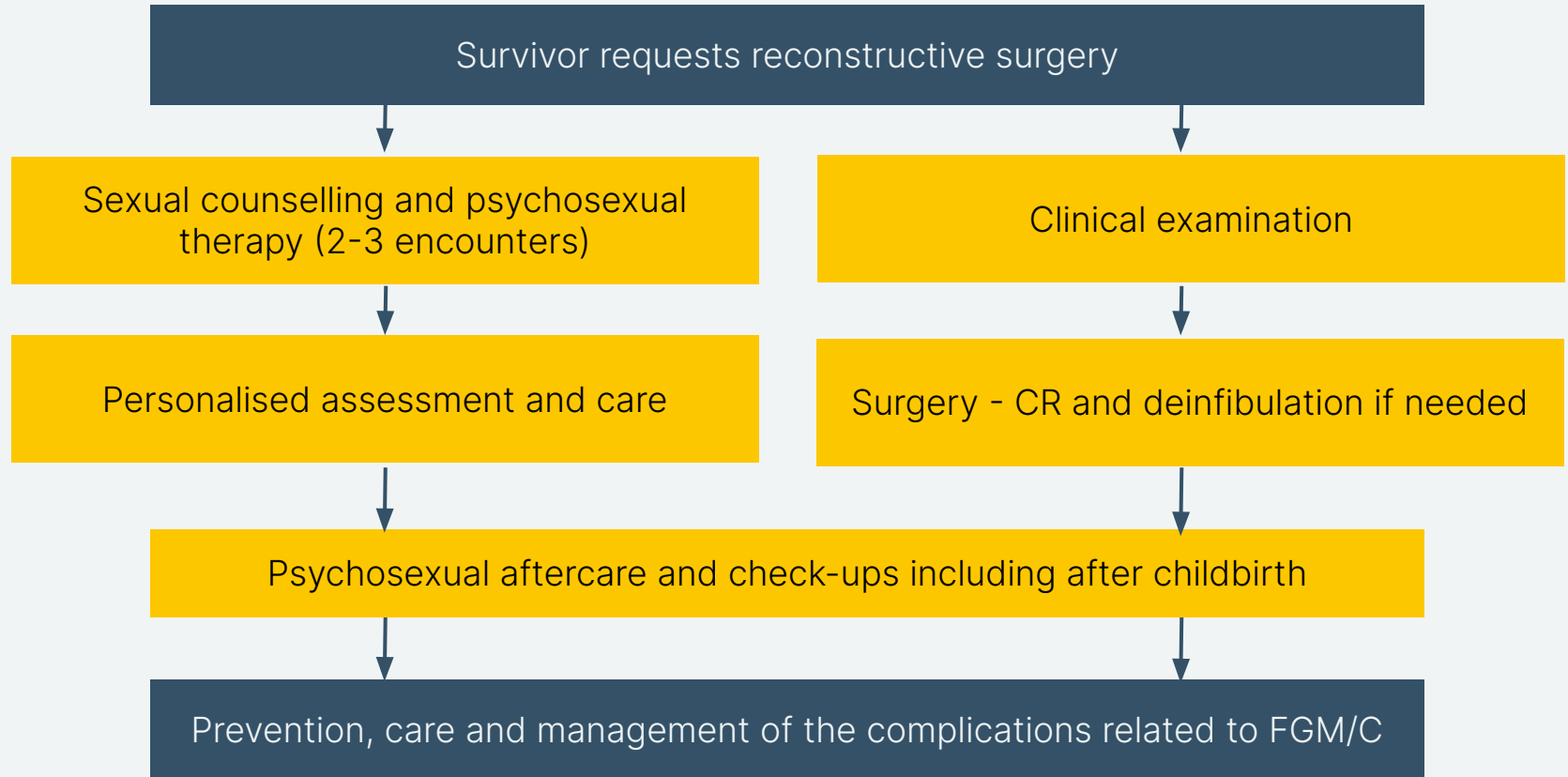
Jasmine Abdulcadir, is an obstetrician and gynecologist trained in sexual medicine. She works as a staff physician, responsible of the Gynaecological and Obstetrical Emergency Unit. She founded and is responsible of the Outpatient clinic for women and girls living with female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) of the Geneva University Hospitals, which provides health education, prevention, and culturally sensitive, clinical, surgical, and psychosexual care for women and girls who experienced FGM/C.

Of Italian and Somali descent, for her work in improving the health of women and girls with FGM/C, she was awarded a Knighthood by the Italian Republic in 2018.

Jasmine provides teaching and training, nationally and internationally, as well as consulting organisations on their work towards ending FGM/C – including the World Health Organisation and the Swiss Network against female circumcision.



# Multidisciplinary Care: The Geneva University Hospital Method



Analysis generously provided by Dr Jasmine Abdulcadir

Q: Any data to show a negative impact following the reconstructive surgery?

**A: The surgery is shown to have an overall positive impact on patients**

Q: Was there a notable and serious complication caused purely by reconstructive surgery?

**A: No notable adverse event**

# Reconstructive surgery in Europe today

The UK is noticeably behind in its surgical resolutions for FGM/C survivors compared to other European countries.

Reconstructive surgery is currently operated in:  
Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland.

26 hospitals across these countries perform reconstructive surgery

British women requesting reconstructive surgery are turned down, but are advised of its availability abroad. This means survivors must travel (far) to access the surgery at their personal cost

Since reconstructive surgeries are not available in the UK and alternative routes are economically inaccessible, survivors are left to deal with ongoing pain and medical complications

# The evidence



## **Huda Mohamed RN, RM. BSc, MSc** *Midwife, Activist and Public Speaker*

Huda is a London-based FGM/C specialist midwife and recipient of The Gold Chief Midwifery Officer award for her local, regional and national work and expertise in FGM/C.

Huda is passionate about educating women and families about their healthcare options and rights.

# Duty of Care

Public authorities are under the public sector equality duty under the Equality Act. This means that they must have “due regard” for advancing equality.

Principle 1 of the NHS Constitution states that it has: “a wider social duty to promote equality through the services it provides and to pay particular attention to groups or sections of society where improvements in health and life expectancy are not keeping pace with the rest of the population.”

Furthermore, the NHS equality statement says: “NHS England has a duty to have regard to the need to reduce health inequalities in access to health services and health outcomes achieved as enshrined in the Health and Social Care Act 2012.”

# Duty of Care

In not providing adequate solutions for survivors, the NHS risks breaching its own equality commitments. In 2014 there was a Parliamentary Inquiry by the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee into Female Genital Mutilation (Cutting) in 2014 for which around 50 organisations and individuals submitted Written Evidence.

Respected bodies such as the Bar Human Rights Committee, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission among others, stressed the importance of providing medical and emotional support for survivors, including reconstructive surgery.

These recommendations were made over nine years ago and yet little to no progress has been made.



## Sabrina Dhowre Elba CEO, Model and Activist

Born in Vancouver, Canada and of Somali Descent, Sabrina Dhowre Elba is passionate about gender equality and promoting the empowerment of women and girls worldwide. Sabrina was appointed UN Goodwill Ambassador for IFAD in April 2020 and has dedicated her efforts as IFAD Goodwill Ambassador to the challenges faced by rural women and girls.

Sabrina also works with various civil society organizations, including Farm Africa, Conservation International, as a board member, on environmental issues, co-chairing the European board for Global Citizen, ambassador for mothers2mothers and patron for S.T.O.R.M. Domestic Violence Charity



"WHEN *women*  
RISE, WE *all rise*."

Thank you

Email [info@thevavengers.co.uk](mailto:info@thevavengers.co.uk)

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THE VAVENGERS



A special thank you

Baroness Rosie Boycott,  
Patron of The Vavengers

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# Campaign supporters and advisory team

Dr Jasmine Abdulcadir | Obstetrician & Gynecologist

Huda Mohamed | NHS CMO Gold Award Winning Midwife

Dr Annemarie Middelburg | Human Rights Consultant

Joy Clarke | FGM Specialist Midwife

Aissa Edon | Midwife and Founder and Chair of FGM Hope Clinic Charity

Waris Dirie | Model, Author, Activist, and Founder of Desert Flower Foundation

Sabrina Elba | Campaign Ambassador

Baroness Rosie Boycott | Campaign Ambassador and Patron

Purpose Campaigns | Campaign design support

Flora Hausammann | Legal research support

“ONCE I HAD  
THE *knowledge*  
ABOUT FGM/C,  
IT WAS LIKE  
GETTING  
*my body* BACK.”

