

1. Government launches campaign to raise awareness about FGM

November 2018

The Home Office has launched a new drive to tackle the “hidden crime” of female genital mutilation. Materials highlighting the potential consequences of the practice will be distributed into communities where statistics suggest it is more prevalent.

Titled Let’s Protect Our Girls, the campaign is the latest attempt to clamp down on FGM, which comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons, according to the World Health Organisation’s definition.

A 2015 study estimated that 137,000 women and girls who have migrated to England and Wales are living with the consequences of FGM.

NHS England statistics released in July show that between April 2017 and March this year, 6,195 individual women and girls had FGM identified or treatment related to it.

The practice has been illegal in the UK since 1985 but authorities have faced criticism over the failure to secure a single conviction.

The new initiative aims to raise awareness over possible effects of FGM, including childbirth complications, period problems, mental health issues and urinary infections.

The campaign will be placed into communities where, according to statistics, FGM may be most prevalent, the Home Office said.

These include Sudanese, Somali, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Egyptian, Iraqi, Gambian and Nigerian communities, the department added.

Activity will be focused in London, Manchester, Liverpool, Bristol, Leicester, Birmingham and Sheffield.

Home Secretary Sajid Javid said: “Female genital mutilation has no place in modern society.

“It is repulsive, unethical and leaves victims with emotional and physical scars that last a lifetime.

“We have launched this important campaign to make it clear to everyone that the practice is illegal and has serious health consequences.

“I urge everyone to help protect girls at risk by spreading the messages.”

The campaign will signpost people who want more information to the NSPCC.

John Cameron, the charity’s head of helplines, said: “We know from calls to our dedicated helpline that female genital mutilation is still affecting hundreds of girls in the UK.

“Sadly, the true picture of how many are affected is unknown because for far too long FGM has been cloaked in secrecy.

“We hope this campaign will help to end the silence that surrounds FGM by encouraging young people and any adults worried about them to speak out and get help.

“By joining forces across communities, we can bring an end to this dangerous and illegal practice.”

Link: <http://home.bt.com/news/uk-news/government-launches-campaign-to-raise-awareness-about-fgm-11364300154884>

2. Drug gangs 'target excluded pupils'

November 2016

School exclusions are "highly significant" in driving gang violence as criminals target vulnerable youngsters, a study will reportedly reveal.

A Home Office-commissioned report found that many children groomed by drug gangs were recruited after they were excluded from school and sent to pupil referral units (PRUs), The Times said.

Last year, Tes uncovered how permanent exclusion rates had increased by as much as 300 per cent in some areas.

And this summer, the Commons Education Select Committee raised concerns about exclusions and alternative provision.

The study will highlight PRUs as "fertile ground" for gang recruitment, where youngsters may only attend for a few hours a week, the paper added.

It comes after the Home Office announced it had established an expert team to tackle gangs that use children as mules in lucrative drug smuggling operations.

The sprawling narcotics distribution model known as "county lines" typically involves city gangs branching out into county or coastal towns to sell heroin and crack cocaine.

They deploy children and vulnerable people as couriers to move drugs and cash between the new market and their urban hub.

The report, carried out by the St Giles Trust charity and due to be published on Monday, concluded that a "high proportion" of children involved in county lines appeared to be outside mainstream education, The Times said.

A separate investigation by the paper revealed gang members were waiting outside PRU gates on the lookout for the most vulnerable children to target.

A government spokesman said it was working to crack down on violent county drug gangs that are "devastating the lives of vulnerable children and communities across the UK".

He added: "We have launched a £3.6 million National County Lines Coordination Centre which will strengthen the law enforcement response to this issue and enable police forces to work together to tackle a crime that crosses regions and demands a multi-agency approach.

"Schools, colleges and pupil referral units all have a legal duty to safeguard children, and we have begun an externally led review on exclusions to explore why some groups of children are more likely to be excluded than others.

"It is important these issues are not tackled in isolation, which is why we are working across government to support early intervention and prevention for these vulnerable young people."

Link: <https://www.tes.com/news/drug-gangs-target-excluded-pupils>