

Safeguarding Update

1. Breast ironing awareness 'needed in school'

April 2019

Breast ironing awareness should be made part of the mandatory school curriculum to protect young girls from abuse, the National Education Union has said.

The practice involves ironing a girl's chest with hot objects to delay breasts from growing, so she does not attract male attention.

Conservative MP Nicky Morgan said teachers must also be educated, as they have a "very important role to play".

The Home Office said teachers have a duty to report concerns.

'Not allowed to cry'

"Kinaya" - whose name we have changed - lives in the UK.

Her family descends from west Africa - where breast ironing originates - and she was subjected to it aged 10.

She said her mother told her that "if I don't iron them, men will start coming to you, to have sex with you".

It is often the child's mother who will undertake the breast ironing, which usually involves heating a stone or spoon on a flame then pressing, massaging or flattening the breast.

This can go on for months.

"Time does not erase that kind of pain," Kinaya explained.

"You're not even allowed to cry out. If you do, you [are said to] have brought shame to your family, you are not a 'strong girl'."

Kinaya is now an adult with daughters of her own.

When her eldest turned 10, her mother proposed that she be breast ironed.

"I said, 'No, no, no, none of my children are going to go through what I went through, as I still live with the trauma.'"

She has since moved away from her family, believing there was a real risk they would have performed breast ironing on her daughters without her consent.

It is thought that around 1,000 girls in the UK have been affected by breast ironing.

But while awareness is growing around female genital mutilation (FGM), there are fears that few people know about breast ironing

There is no specific offence for breast ironing, but the Home Office described it as a form of child abuse and said it should be prosecuted under general assault laws.

Angie Marriott, a former gynaecological nurse who now works as a safeguarding lecturer for Cheshire Police, said that the true scale of breast ironing in the UK was being obscured because of under-reporting. She described it as a "sensitive, hidden crime", with women afraid to speak out for fear of being "ousted from their communities".



Link: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-47695169>

April 2019

2. A response to our letter to DExEU on the consequences for children's safety of a No Deal Brexit

The following is a response to our letter to the Department for Exiting the European Union, written with the other UK Children's Commissioners, on the consequences for children's safety of a No Deal Brexit. It highlights how a No Deal scenario would disrupt some of the mechanisms in place to protect children

Dear Anne, Sally, Bruce and Koulla

Thank you for your letter of 19 February about child protection arrangements in the context of the UK's exit from the European Union.

Child safety is an important issue; protection from abuse and neglect is a fundamental right for all children and young people. Effective cooperation with European law enforcement and criminal justice partners is an important element in our efforts to tackle the horrific acts of those who seek to harm the most vulnerable in our society. The Government's commitment to this issue is not affected by our exit from the EU. You asked for clarity on a number of points, which I have sought to address below.

Co-operation on child protection and law enforcement

The UK currently participates in around 40 EU tools and measures that support and enhance law enforcement and judicial cooperation between the UK and EU Member States. These tools work as a package to provide an integrated operational system to identify, pursue and prosecute criminals, including those who pose a threat to children.

Whilst our security relationship will change once we have left the EU, it is in our mutual interests to protect these operational capabilities. That is why, in the Political Declaration, we have agreed the framework for a comprehensive future security relationship with the EU that includes, for example, data-sharing arrangements for wanted and missing persons, and the exchange of criminal records. The Withdrawal Agreement provides for a time-limited implementation period which, once ratified, will come into force on 29 March 2019. During this period the UK will continue to participate in all the law enforcement and criminal justice measures to which we currently have access and which help us continue to work with EU partners to tackle international child sexual exploitation and abuse.

In the event that we leave the EU without a deal, the mechanisms that we currently use to cooperate with EU Member States on law enforcement and criminal justice matters will cease to be available to us. Broadly speaking, this would mean making more use of alternative channels, including Interpol, Council of Europe Conventions and other forms of cooperation such as bilateral channels. Our contingency plans are largely tried and tested mechanisms, which we already use for cooperating with many non-EU countries, but they are not like-for-like replacements. We are therefore working closely with our operational partners, including the National Crime Agency (NCA) and the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) to prepare to operate through these alternative channels thus ensuring we can continue to work together to protect children in the UK and the EU.

Link: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2019/03/19/a-response-to-our-letter-to-dexeu-on-the-consequences-for-childrens-safety-of-a-no-deal-brexit/>