

Female Genital Mutilation

**Ethics, Transparency & Audit Panel
March 2019**



Review number 18003

About ETAP

The Ethics, Transparency and Audit Panel (ETAP) is made up of members of the public, who play a significant and central role in ensuring effective accountability and governance is delivered.

ETAP is about much more than fulfilling statutory Audit Committee responsibilities, it has used its wide-ranging and rigorous powers to scrutinise crime recording, forensics, Taser use, and stop and search to make sure decisions made by the police are correct and in the best interests of the public.

ETAP was set up by Matthew Ellis the Staffordshire Commissioner for Police, Fire and Rescue and Crime to make policing in Staffordshire the most open and transparent in the country.

To find out more about ETAP and see previous reports go to <https://staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk/ethics/>

Review	Female Genital Mutilation
Project No	18003
Revision	V7.3
Revision description	Final
Prepared by	Clare Cowley, Adrian Bowen
Reviewed by	Nicki Furlong, Susan Arnold, David Davies,
Approved by	Glynn Dixon
Issue date	21.03.2019

Female Genital Mutilation

Objective

With greater public awareness of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), the Ethics, Transparency and Audit Panel (ETAP) was unsighted on the prevalence of FGM in Staffordshire. To seek reassurance on what Staffordshire Police was doing to prevent and investigate cases of FGM and encourage reporting of such crimes, the Panel decided to conduct this review to identify the key processes and whether these were followed, establish the volume of FGM reports and conduct a small audit of cases for validation. The review fieldwork took place in summer 2018 and recommendations are based on factual information gathered at that time.

Executive Summary

There were 15 potential FGM cases reported to Staffordshire Police in the year 2017 to 2018, with even fewer recorded after investigation, which is in keeping with the national position. The number of girls under 15 potentially at risk is estimated to be in excess of 20,000 nationally.

Staffordshire has a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), where staff from Police, Childrens Social Services, Adult Social Services, Health and Probation are co-located to assess risk in cases including suspected FGM. The review team were impressed with the working arrangements in place in the MASH. Information was received and quickly assessed by the partner agencies, which aim to research what they know about the family and then meet and discuss the risk within two hours of receiving that information. The review team's short audit of FGM reports confirmed that the MASH was exceeding that target, risk assessing the information available and making decisions as to which agency/agencies would investigate further in under two hours. FGM is always categorised as serious risk of harm within the MASH, and police, social services and health decide on the best way to investigate further and make a referral to investigators with a package of information on what is known.

Recent changes in structure have led child abuse investigations to be passed to a specialist child abuse investigation team. This allows for more focus on training and support, which some interviewees reported had suffered in recent years. The Force has identified an inspector role to be a subject matter lead for FGM, providing an opportunity to increase knowledge of FGM with police, partners and the general public.

The short audit of FGM reports provided two examples where there had apparently been a delay in cases being referred to the MASH, and consequently to the police by partner agencies. This is despite the legal duty to report such concerns to the police as soon as practicable. The number of reports overall is low, and any delays are an area of concern for the review team if this is representative.

As a result of our review, some recommendations are put forward for consideration:

1. That Staffordshire Police reviews its current policy to reflect recent changes to its structures and consider including guidance on how officers and staff could work with communities and other professionals to encourage reporting and prevent harm from taking place.
2. A feasibility study considers investigating the possibility for a shared IT System between Police, Health and Social Services to improve communications.

3. Subject lead for FGM to assess knowledge and identify opportunities to increase awareness and to encourage early reporting of FGM, both within the Force and the wider partnership.
4. That the FGM subject lead works with partners to raise awareness of the crime of FGM within practicing communities in Staffordshire using College of Policing best practice.
5. That ETAP schedules a review of child abuse investigation teams in 2019/20 to assess their establishment and training, together with their links to the MASH.

Review Process

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a criminal offence. It is both child abuse and a form of violence against women and girls and has been a criminal offence in the UK since 1985. In 2003 it also became a criminal offence for UK nationals or permanent UK residents to take their child abroad to have female genital mutilation. There are an estimated 137,000 women and girls affected by FGM in England and Wales. In a 2015 report, regional breakdowns of prevalence estimates show that every area of the UK is likely to be affected in some way. National research suggests that there are many more cases of suspected FGM than are ever reported to the police. The police have specific responsibilities in terms of joint investigation and also prevention through the use of FGM Protection Orders (FGMPOs), a civil measure which can be applied for through a family court.

There have been 15 reports of suspected FGM in the period April 2017 – March 2018, of which only one remains as a crime. This may not represent the true number of women and girls at risk. This does not mean that all girls and women from communities that have historically practiced FGM would be at risk in Staffordshire. The issue is that the gap between those potentially at risk and the actual number of reports is so great that it suggests there may be an issue of under reporting and/or referral to the police which is outside their control.

Policy

Staffordshire Police has a specific policy on FGM as part of a suite of policies on domestic abuse, honour based violence, forced marriage and stalking and harassment. The policy sets out the offences covered by the FGM Act 2003 and the Serious Crime Act 2015, together with other important and relevant powers such as those giving the police the power to take a child away from their parents into police protection. The ETAP review team were pleased to see that it gave unequivocal, force-specific guidance for frontline staff on positive action they needed to take to safeguard young people and refer them to those responsible in the force for investigating such crimes.

The ETAP review team believe this policy could be enhanced in a number of regards. Clearly this policy will be amended to take account of the new child abuse investigation structures implemented in September 2018. In addition, the review team believe more reference could be made to the role of the Staffordshire MASH, given its availability, access to intelligence and expertise in this area. We also believe that the policy should be more explicit as to when reports would be crimed, and by whom. At present, officers are directed to complete a crime report at a very early stage when a child is believed to be at risk of FGM, which we believe is unlikely to happen in practice.

FGM Protection Orders (FGMPOs) offer a legal means to protect and safeguard victims and potential victims of FGM. FGMPOs are granted by a court and are unique to each

case. They contain conditions to protect a victim or potential victim from FGM. This could include, for example, surrendering a passport to prevent the person at risk from being taken abroad for FGM or requirements that no one arranges for FGM to be performed on the person being protected. Although the Force policy makes reference to FGMPOs, it does not include this power under 'next steps' for those at risk of FGM for officers to follow.

The review team accept that it is generally social services who apply for such orders, at least for those under 18, but the police could take a proactive approach to promoting their use in appropriate cases and have the power to apply for them should it wish to do so. Therefore, we believe that it could be addressed more explicitly in the policy.

The current policy also focusses on responding to reports of (potential) FGM. However, it does not consider the role of Staffordshire Police in the prevention agenda, working with practicing communities and other professionals to educate and encourage early reporting. This would include working with victims and those at risk as children and young adults, as well as parents and community leaders.

Recommendation – that Staffordshire Police review its current policy to reflect recent changes to its structures and consider including guidance on how officers and staff could work with communities and other professionals to encourage reporting and prevent harm from taking place.

Staffordshire Police works with a wide range of agencies to safeguard children and adults from abuse, including FGM. Staffordshire has two Safeguarding Children Boards – Stoke and Staffordshire, together with an Adult Safeguarding Board for the County. As part of these arrangements, Staffordshire Police has worked in partnership for over seven years with Children's Social Services, Adult Social Services, Health (including mental health) and the Probation Service to provide the 'Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub' (MASH). Over 100 staff from these organisations work in the MASH and receive referrals from professionals across the County. Their role is to research what is known about those individuals on their respective systems, risk assess that intelligence and to refer as appropriate to the agency (or agencies) best placed to mitigate that risk.

The MASH works Monday to Friday across an extended day and out of hours cover is provided through a combination of on duty investigators and emergency social services, with on call managers from both agencies available 24/7. ETAP members were impressed with the working arrangements seen within the MASH, in particular the speedy response to reports of FGM. It was clear that FGM was seen as a priority, and their two-hour response time to research and assess new cases was borne out by the cases we reviewed during our short audit.

Staffordshire Police follows statutory guidance on inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, known as 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'. The police team working within the MASH consists of up to 30 staff who check information received against multiple police systems, both local and national, to help provide a picture on what is known across the partnership about the family.

Referral Process

Incidents can be referred to the MASH by police neighbourhood teams, health workers including hospitals, social workers and schools amongst others, either directly or indirectly. These concerns are recorded on a shared IT system known as ISL that is auditable and searchable, and the partnership agencies are tasked with working through

this system. Staff expressed a view that they would benefit from having an intelligence system that was shared between police, health and social services. This would avoid having to copy and paste information into ISL, and enable any staff member to access all information known without having to refer it to a colleague. The ETAP review team agree this would be a more efficient system, consideration of which could be made within the current review of Staffordshire Police IT systems.

Recommendation – a feasibility study considers investigating the possibility for a shared IT System between Police, Health and Social Services to improve communications.

The partnership has agreed a two-hour response time from receiving the information for completing their background checks, with the intention of holding what is known as an initial strategy discussion within that time frame. FGM is always categorised as serious risk of harm within the MASH, and police, social services and health decide on the best way to investigate matters further and make a referral to investigators with a package of information on what is known. Police investigations are then recorded on a separate IT system known as Guardian.

Investigation Process

In the recent past, reports of FGM were investigated by the serious crime investigation team. Those teams also investigated other serious crimes and there is a natural tension between investigations requiring immediate police response such as murder, and more protracted investigations such as child abuse investigations with multi agency involvement. The ETAP review team was shown the past investigation review team profiles, and specialist child abuse investigators were spread between the wider teams responding to serious crime. Whilst this provided coverage, it has been recognised by the Force that this arrangement was not ideal. From September 2018 a designated child abuse investigation team has taken investigation packages from the MASH. This development is welcomed by the ETAP review team.

In addition to specialist teams, the new Directorate structure identified a subject matter lead for FGM at Inspector level and will provide the sort of welfare support and specialist training that has been recognised as essential for child abuse investigation.

ETAP believes that there are other benefits to this new structure. Managers involved in FGM investigations believe that some referrals are delayed unnecessarily by other agencies. For example, there was a referral to the police made by health following childbirth that suggested that a newborn child might be at risk from FGM because her mother had been a victim of FGM in the past. However, midwives involved in the mother's healthcare during the previous nine months would have been aware of this, but had not referred until after the birth. This view was supported by the (limited) audit conducted by ETAP, where in two of the three cases reviewed, other agencies only referred their concerns to the MASH and therefore the police, after several days. If this is representative, it would be of considerable concern to the ETAP review team.

In addition, an investigations manager was concerned that there may be a lack of knowledge across the Force about FGM. ETAP has no specific evidence supporting this, and in a limited review of information by ETAP it is not possible to substantiate these concerns. In the new structure, the new subject lead could conduct work with partner organisations and the general public to encourage earlier reporting. There would also be an opportunity to assess the Force's awareness of FGM, and if necessary, make recommendations on how staff across Staffordshire Police could be made more aware of

this very serious crime.

Recommendation – subject lead for FGM to assess knowledge and identify opportunities to increase awareness and to encourage early reporting of FGM, both within the Force and the wider partnership.

Reporting levels and community awareness

Given the nature of FGM, it is not a widely reported crime. People carrying out the procedure may have recently arrived in the UK and have no idea that it is illegal in the UK. If a woman or girl has come from a community where all of the girls have undergone FGM, she may believe that the health problems she is experiencing as a result of the procedure are a normal part of female life. If FGM is committed when the victim is a child, she may have little memory of it or be unaware it is illegal in the UK. It is therefore, essential that the police and other organisations work together with statutory and third-sector partners, other agencies and communities affected, to raise awareness of the health risks and increase knowledge of the criminal law relating to FGM. e.g., through work undertaken at the Health and Wellbeing Board or Child and Adult Safeguarding Boards.

The College of Policing gives advice on people and organisations that the police can work with to raise awareness within practicing communities in its Authorised Professional Practice.¹ Reporting levels are extremely low across the country which is replicated in Staffordshire. ETAP review team saw no evidence of the Force working proactively to increase referrals to the MASH either from the community or from other professionals such as health and schools.

Recommendation – that the FGM subject lead works with partners to raise awareness of the crime of FGM within practicing communities in Staffordshire using College of Policing best practice.

Training

There are several ways in which staff from Staffordshire Police can receive training in FGM. For example, both of the county's child safeguarding boards provide multi agency awareness training on FGM. The ETAP team were provided with examples of courses that were free to attend, although the employee would be absent from their teams for either a day or half day. These are entry level courses, more suitable for the generalist than a specialist, but have the advantage of being multi agency. Attendance rates from Staffordshire Police were provided, and whilst there were 25 police attendees between March 2014 and June 2015, only six people from Staffordshire Police have attended since then. There could be many reasons for this, but an opportunity exists for more staff, particularly those in specific roles or those who could be champions for their teams, to attend free training.

FGM training is included for new constables, PCSOs and control room staff as part of wider safeguarding training and is tailored to their role. For example, there is an e-learning package (known as NCALT) that is mandatory for PCSOs in Staffordshire. Most have completed a series of packages, one of which is called "family disturbance" and refers to FGM. There are differences of opinion on the effectiveness of e-learning packages, however it provides an opportunity for large numbers of staff to gain awareness

¹ <https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/female-genital-mutilation/>

of an issue with minimal abstraction from the workplace. Police officer recruits have specific input on FGM as part of week ten of their initial learning programme, given their greater role.

The ETAP review team also discussed specialist training for child abuse investigators with staff from learning and development. Nationally, the College of Policing makes recommendation on the level of training required for those staff who become specialist child abuse investigators. It recommends completion of a general course for those involved in serious crime investigation, the Initial Crime Investigator Development Programme (ICIDP), which should then be followed by the Specialist Child Abuse Investigator Development Programme (SCAIDP).

Staffordshire Police mapped the aims and objectives from its existing courses to ensure that they achieved the learning outcomes required for specialist child abuse investigators, and this approach was agreed by the college of policing. Officers would then be assigned to child abuse investigation roles and begin a process of workplace accreditation.

FGM is included in the ICIDP, and therefore all officers who have trained as a detective have had an input on this as part of a package on Forced Marriage, Honour Based Violence and FGM. Reports of FGM where the victim is under 18 would normally be investigated by specialist child abuse investigators, but the ETAP review team was told that due to retirements the number of accredited officers and those working towards accreditation has fallen in recent years. The numbers are now rising, no doubt as part of the formation of the new dedicated child abuse investigation teams, something which is welcomed by ETAP.

ETAP recognises that Staffordshire Police is undergoing significant changes in terms of child abuse investigation and training. The ETAP review team believes that there should be a follow up review on the structure, numbers and training of child abuse investigation teams in 3rd quarter of 2019/20, 12 months after the formation of the new team, to evaluate progress and ensure child victims of crime receive an excellent standard of care.

Recommendation – that ETAP schedules a review of child abuse investigation teams in 2019/20 to assess their establishment and training, together with their links to the MASH.

Audit Results

In the recording year of 2017 to 2018, there were 15 reports of potential FGM recorded on the Guardian IT system. The ETAP review team went through three of these cases selected at random to see whether policy and procedure was being followed. The results of this audit are set out in brief below, although case details are not included for confidentiality reasons. These support our findings and recommendations in the report.

Case 1 – R/7900/17

There was a delay in Staffordshire Police being informed of this case. Social services were aware on Monday 26 June 2017, but police were not informed (apparently) until 30 June 2017, a Friday afternoon. Once the MASH was informed, intelligence checks were completed and passed to partners within one hour, and a strategy discussion took place within 90 minutes of the report being received, which is excellent. Whilst a further strategy meeting was arranged for the following Monday, this had to be rescheduled until later that week. It is not clear from the Guardian record why no officer was available to attend from the investigation teams on that Monday. The decision of the later strategy meeting was for social services to visit the family within three days, however the record does not show

what the outcome of that meeting was, nor even that it had taken place and make reference to social services records, and the Guardian record was simply closed. The ETAP review team believe that as a minimum, this information should be recorded.

Case 2 – R/1705/18

Again, there was a delay in Staffordshire Police being informed. A school nurse observed concerning behavior in one of their pupils on a Monday, but the MASH was not informed until the following Friday (2 February 2018). Once the MASH had the information, intelligence checks were made and shared within one hour and a strategy discussion was held within 90 minutes of the report being received, an excellent response time and well within their two-hour target. This report was also allocated to a single agency – social services – to follow through, but there is no indication on the Guardian system as to what happened, just that no further action was being taken. The case had clearly de-escalated once the intelligence had been collated, but the ETAP review team are still concerned that a case can simply be closed four months later with no reference being made as to the outcome of investigations or reference to that agency's records. [Nb There is also a stray entry in this record, apparently unrelated to this case, dated 14/3/18].

Case 3 – R/11953/17

This case involved a child who was subject to an FGM Protection Order and had returned to the UK. Within 24 hours of this being reported to the MASH by a health visitor, a strategy discussion had been held and a medical examination had taken place. On this occasion, the record was updated to give the outcome of the case and demonstrates very swift and effective action taken by the MASH and partners. The record does not indicate how quickly the MASH were informed after it became known that the child had returned to the UK.

Summary Findings

The review team believes that the MASH provides a good foundation on which to build the new child abuse investigation structure, which started in September 2018. The Force clearly acted swiftly to investigate those cases of FGM that were referred to them but can only act upon what they are told. There are new opportunities to be more proactive within the new Directorate structure, working with communities and partners alike to prevent FGM being practised in Staffordshire.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations are put forward for consideration:

1. That Staffordshire Police review its current policy to reflect recent changes to its structures and consider including guidance on how officers and staff could work with communities and other professionals to encourage reporting and prevent harm from taking place.
2. A feasibility study considers investigating the possibility for a shared IT System between Police, Health and Social Services to improve communications.
3. Subject lead for FGM to assess knowledge and identify opportunities to increase awareness and to encourage early reporting of FGM, both within the Force and the wider partnership.
4. That the FGM subject lead works with partners to raise awareness of the crime of FGM within practicing communities in Staffordshire using College of Policing best practice.

5. That ETAP schedules a review of child abuse investigation teams in 2019/20 to assess their establishment and training, together with their links to the MASH.

Contributors to the Report

The review team were grateful for the time taken by staff from the Staffordshire Commissioners Office, the MASH, serious crime investigation, the Force Crime Registrar and Learning and Development in conducting this review.

Documents and/or Systems used in the scrutiny process

Force FGM Policy.

The following systems were accessed as appropriate as part of the audit of FGM reports: ISL (MASH system), Guardian (safeguarding system), Storm (command and control system), CMS2 (crime recording system) and SPIN (intelligence system).

Data was also provided from force training systems including NCALT.

Declaration

The conclusions and recommendations made by ETAP are on an independent basis and will not be changed unless by factual challenge or based on new information provided.