

FGM: Police Stand Accused Of Failing To Protect Girls From Child Abuse As Fresh Evidence Emerges

Dina Rickman, *The Huffington Post*, 08.08.2012

British police are facing questions over why there have been no convictions for female genital mutilation in the UK, after it emerged senior officers have not discussed how to enforce the law and protect children over the past year.

London Assembly member Jenny Jones has written to Met police chief Bernard Hogan-Howe after *The Huffington Post* UK revealed the results of a freedom of information request on the issue and shared fresh evidence from campaigners.

The request showed senior officers in the Met Police's Child Abuse Investigation Command have no record of correspondence about enforcing the law in the last year, despite securing no convictions.

Campaigners have also voiced their frustration at what they say is a lack of response by officers to information they are providing on potential and past victims of the crime.

Up to 24,000 young girls are estimated to be at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Britain, which mostly occurs when girls as young as four are taken abroad by their relatives to be "cut". The practice has serious long-term effects and leaves women at risk of a wide range of health problems, including chronic infection, infertility, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Jones described the lack of correspondence as "an indication the Met is failing in its duty to gain justice for these women".

She is asking Hogan-Howe to explain the priority given to reports of FGM, including how many officers are being assigned to Project Azure - the team that deals with the issue.

Jones, who serves on the London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, told *The Huffington Post* UK: "I am asking the Met Commissioner questions about how seriously they take this crime; if sufficient staff and resources are being put into this unit; and what exactly does this specialist unit do to really help these women?"

Her letter comes as campaigners say officers are failing to act on information they are providing about victims of FGM.

Nimco Ali, co-director of charity Daughters of Eve, whose organisation was involved in making the video 'Cut - Some Wounds Never Heal', told *The Huffington Post* UK that during a meeting at a school in south London she raised concerns about a pro-FGM 17-year-old with a baby daughter in front of a police officer.

"A young women from the project said she had had undergone FGM and thought it was fine, she was 17, she had married when she finished Y11 and had a baby daughter.

"I was very concerned that the girl's child was at risk and said so, the police officer didn't even connect the dots."

She also passed on a series of BBMs to police about the case of a four-year-old girl who was being sent to Somalia to have the procedure.

She told *The Huffington Post* UK young women who helped make her charity's educational video had disclosed they had FGM off-camera: "There were about five or six girls involved, they were all in Y11, between 15-16. They were talking about their experience - there was no feeling that police should take their names or follow it up or make sure they didn't have sisters at risk. The young women spoke about their experience and there was no support provided to them it was assumed a voluntary organisation would step in and we did but this is unacceptable "

The Met police said: “The MPS is a leading agency nationally in promoting awareness of FGM.”

“A lack of prosecutions does not reflect a lack of progress or rigour in the tackling of FGM. All allegations are rigorously investigated and receive senior manager scrutiny...

“Many of the practicing communities have a lack of understanding about the health consequences of FGM and are unaware that it is illegal here in the UK. In addition to this, there may also be immigration related fears.”

A 2011 report, The Missing Link, says FGM is performed by communities from Somalia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Egypt, Djibouti, and, to a lesser degree, communities in Uganda, Niger, Ghana and Cameroon as well as by some groups in India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, as well as Oman and Yemen.