

Equalities and Human Rights Committee
Female Genital Mutilation (Protection and Guidance) (Scotland) Bill
Note of Meeting with Community InfoSource
30 July 2019

In attendance:

- Fulton McGregor MSP
- Hassan Darasi (Project Manager, Challenging Violence Against Women Project)
- Diane Risbey (Project mentor/Challenging Violence Against Women Project)
- two Community Champions and 3 project workers.

Summary

- Community Infosource is the only men's group in Scotland to work with men to challenge ideas about FGM
- Train men from different communities to go out and work in their own communities and language
- The project uses different approaches, for example, offering assistance with things like benefits, to build up trust and bring men in
- Some men are more resistant than others, but change can come. Many men are very unaware of the legal position on FGM, or that it happens in the first place, or the amount of physical/psychological harm, and that it has no religious foundation.
- Supportive of the Bill and feel punishment and awareness are both needed.

Challenging Violence against Women Project

Background on the Project

- The project began six years ago with communities affected by FGM. Most people see FGM as a women's issue.
- Originally Community InfoSource was an FGM project, but they decided it should be broader and view it in terms of gender-based violence. However, it is funded as an FGM project.
- The Project works on prevention at grassroots level. They do this by training Community Champions, who speak to men in their own language about the impact of FGM.
- Champions talk about the historical/religious background and legal/medical issues to do with FGM. FGM began in the 5th century BCE and there are no religious connections. The Project finds that focusing on the religious and medical issues is the most effective tool.

- It is a shock for men to find this out the harm and unnecessary nature of FGM – they've never questioned it before. Men may question why they are discussing it. Some men may be more resistant than others – the Project worker will judge when it is the right time to talk about FGM. Once the Project worker has discussed the issue, the response has been positive.
- Community Champions develop their own workshops and materials, using research and talking about human rights for daughters, mothers and sisters. They will talk to men at work, in libraries and on the streets.

Men's experience of FGM

- found that very few men know that FGM is illegal in the UK. They are not aware that the offence of FGM has a maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment. They are genuinely shocked.
- Sometimes men did not realise the medical implications for women/wives. Participants at the meeting said that many people within their communities did not know FGM existed.
- During childbirth, many of the fathers do not always know that FGM has taken place. During the workshops, men have realised that FGM has happened to their families and did not know this before attending the workshops.
- One of the participants didn't realise his region in Nigeria practiced FGM, he only discovered this in his 40s. This was a common view, it's a revelation to some men. A baby can be taken away by an older woman, and you've no idea what is going on. Then the baby is given back.
- Attitudes are changing, but it takes time. There were experiences in the group of men coming from small villages where there is social pressure to have FGM, otherwise no one will marry their daughter. Each community has a different reason for why they do it. It is about the marriageability of daughters and/or controlling their sexuality.
- The Project uses an awareness survey at start and end of the workshop. Men know very little about FGM at the start, but awareness goes up in the second survey at the end of the workshop. The survey includes questions about the physical, medical and mental impact of FGM, its history, the types of FGM, and the legal aspects.

Views on the Bill

- The participants were positive about the introduction of FGM Protection Orders, and that this would help to strengthen the law. They felt it sends a clear message.
- They suggested the guidance should have more of a focus for people who work in the Third Sector. Case studies, and information on how Protection Orders will work in practice would be particularly helpful for Third Sector organisations.
- Overall, it was felt that punishment was needed alongside awareness raising on FGM. This would be awareness raising for community members, as many believe it is a cultural practice and they are not doing anything wrong, but also for professionals who may be too culturally sensitive and not feel comfortable in raising concerns.
- Welcome these measures as a real contribution to the prevention strategy which raises the issue of deterrent and not just the present punishment of the practice.
- Would like to know if there is going to be guidance for Third Sector organisations working in the field and asked for language which is clear and non-technical.
- Would like clarification of what is meant by “other person with permission of the court”, examples of what would trigger an application for a protection order and what measures would be taken, what would constitute a breach and what measures would be taken if breach occurred.