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# SWIG CONFERENCE SPEECH

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SWIG

Welcome to the Sierra Women Independent Group Girls@Risk of FGM Conference. My name is Elfreda Kebbie and I am the current chair of SWIG.

I would like to express my thanks to the conference organising committee, especially Miss Eneyi Pemu - the conference organising manager, members of the Sierra Women Independent Group and Mr Delwyn Thomas the conference coordinator, for organising this conference on Girls@Risk of FGM.

This conference brings many people together from the medical, legal professions and civil society groups to discuss an issue that as a community we are slowly coming to recognise, if not yet fully to understand.

I especially welcome the collaboration between the Bristol Children's Safeguarding Board, the Bristol City Council, medical practitioners, lawyers, police, academics, community organisations, and especially women community leaders and those that are directly affected.

The Sierra Women Independent Group is a community organisation based in Bristol.

We are an all female group working to address concerns of women and children in ethnic minority communities living in and around Bristol. SWIG are working together to raise awareness of the important role women have in contributing to community and national development. We promote socio-economic development, health and cultural values, through exchange programmes, exhibitions, seminars, conferences, workshops, trades and festivals.

Our objectives are to promote and facilitate cross-cultural understanding and integration amongst other ethnic communities, and with their hosts, in the context of cultural diversity.

The Girls@Risk Of FGM Conference is a Big Lottery funded project that aims to create awareness of the risks of Female Genital Mutilation amongst teachers and pupils from FGM prevalent countries. This project will bring together community groups, health professionals and the police to work as a team in tackling the risk of Female Genital Mutilation in our communities in Bristol.

Female Genital Mutilation has no health benefits, and it harms girls and women in many ways.

### **Why is FGM still a common practice in some parts of the world?**

In many parts of the world, the FGM practice is associated with deeply entrenched cultural, mythological, religious and political ideologies. These include:

- ✓ Cultural (prestige and comradeship)
- ✓ Power
- ✓ Politics
- ✓ Rituals
- ✓ Religion

In some communities, FGM has no link to religion. For example, in Sierra Leone, religious leaders are actively campaigning against FGM.

### **FGM and the migrant communities**

Some migrants believe that they will one day be able to go back and therefore daughters need to be circumcised so they will be accepted.

Consequently, some of these communities are involved in the FGM practice.

Others take their daughters back to their home countries to undergo FGM, even when they are aware of the harm it can bring.

### **Our responsibilities**

- ✓ Everyone has a duty to safeguard Girls@Risk of FGM.
- ✓ Make no assumptions.
- ✓ Be sensitive to the intimate nature of the subject.
- ✓ Be sensitive to the fact that the individual may be loyal to their parents.

Let us continue to create awareness of the risks of FGM towards people of various cultures.

Remember, FGM is illegal and that professionals are all legally obliged to report all safeguarding concerns or suspicions to the police or social services.

In a multicultural society it is vital that we embrace and celebrate these differences, however, while it is useful to be aware of someone's culture, it is equally important not to assume that everyone from that culture are the same.

Let us work together to protect Girls@Risk of FGM.

Thanks for listening