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Survivor subjected to female genital mutilation aged just six speaks out amidst warnings victims are 'slipping through net'

A woman who was tortured as a child through the barbaric practice of

female genital mutilation has bravely spoken of her ordeal.

By Susie Beever

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Publishing in progress...

Publication of this video is in progress, it will be available soon.

Hibo Wardere was subjected aged just six to the practice - known as FGM - which entails the cutting of female genitals for non-medical purposes. It is practiced most commonly in parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East, although is known to be undergone among some communities in the UK and is punishable by up to 14 years in prison.

Concerns have risen that girls at risk of FGM from their families and communities may be more at risk during the current lockdown as schools are closed and there is less access to support networks such as teachers and friends.

Somali-born author and campaigner Ms Wardere spoke about her memory of being cut as a child as tomorrow (Saturday) marks the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, describing how her mother sat by her as an elder woman used razors to carry out the practice.

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Hibo Wardere, a victim of FGM speaks out on her experience on the abusive practice she was forced to undergo aged just six

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Speaking in the video published by charity Safe Hands, she said: "When she made the first cut I think I just screamed...I thought I was dying and I remember saying 'mum'. Then there was another cut and another cut and I just lost count of how many cuts this woman was doing.

"I could see my blood all over her hands...my screams just kept getting louder and louder and nobody was listening. It was being tortured by the people you love the most which was the most hurtful thing."

It comes as authorities raise concerns that warning signs girls may be in danger could be slipping through the net.

Legal expert Hatti Suvari, who hosts the Get Legally Speaking podcast, told The Yorkshire Post: "Lockdown has meant that families have had more time to not only think about FGM, but to make arrangements to have these practices carried out, given that attendance to a household is all that may be required.

Legal expert Hatti Suvari says girls at risk from FGM may be slipping through the net during the lockdown

"Young girls unable to go out and about as a result of the lockdown, to school, or out with friends as they normally would, could find it very difficult to get the help they need to try and stop this practise from taking place."

She added: "As a young girl, if you were raised to believe that this practice is part of your cultural and sometimes religious beliefs, if would be very difficult for you to challenge that with the adults around you, particularly if you are only a young child yourself."

Suzanne Jackson, a Domestic Abuse Risk Assessor (DARA) for South Yorkshire Police, said that FGM had "serious and long-lasting effects" on victims, as seen in the video of Ms Wardare speaking about her experience.

"While we know FGM happens abroad, it is also happening here in the UK and we believe it remains an under-reported crime. This is especially so during the current pandemic, where many people have been at home for prolonged periods of time with potentially very little contact or interaction with others. This could mean that victims of FGM are finding it harder to tell someone what’s happening, or for others to notice the warning signs."

There are fears girls at risk from FGM in the UK may be slipping through the net during the lockdown

FGM Protection Orders created in 2015 now mean that girls can be protected from the practice through an injunctive order through family courts, and there have been more than 400 applications for the orders between 2015 and 2019.

Despite this, there has only been one criminal conviction for FGM since it was outlawed in England and Wales in 1985.

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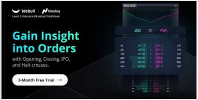
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