



## HARMFUL CULTURAL PRACTICES POLICY

### LONDON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP (LSCP)

The London Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) has developed guidance to support professionals in safeguarding children and young people whose welfare may be at risk due to harmful practices linked to faith, culture, or tradition. This policy outlines common harmful practices, the associated risks, and guidance on safeguarding responses.

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### OVERVIEW OF HARMFUL PRACTICES

Harmful cultural practices can cause significant harm or even death. These include:

- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
- So-called Honour-Based Violence (HBV)
- Forced Marriage
- Non-therapeutic Male Circumcision
- Breast Ironing
- Belief in Spirit Possession or Witchcraft

All are forms of abuse. Any concerns must be referred to the **Children and Families Hub**, specifying the nature of the harmful practice. If a child is in **immediate danger**, call **999**.

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### HONOUR-BASED VIOLENCE (HBV)

**Definition:** HBV includes crimes such as assault, imprisonment, and murder, carried out to punish individuals for allegedly bringing "shame" or dishonour on their family or community. This often involves controlling behaviour and is typically directed at girls and women.

#### Key Facts:

- Perpetrated with approval of family or community.
- Victims may be taken overseas.
- HBV can be a precursor to forced marriage.
- Affects a wide range of cultural groups, including (but not limited to) Turkish, Kurdish, Afghani, South Asian, African, and Eastern European communities.

**Action:** See the LSCP Honour Based Abuse Practice Guidance.

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## FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)

**Definition:** FGM is illegal in the UK and constitutes a severe form of child abuse and violence against women and girls.

### Safeguarding Approach:

- Must be addressed within existing child and adult safeguarding frameworks.
- All professionals have a duty to report and support at-risk individuals.

### Resources:

- [Bromley FGM Guidance & Protocol (2023)]
  - [FGM Reporting Flowchart (2023)]
  - Multilingual info (Somali, English)
  - [London FGM Resource Pack]
  - [NSPCC FGM Information]
  - [Government Multi-agency Statutory Guidance (2020)]
  - [FGM Protection Orders Factsheet]
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## FORCED MARRIAGE

**Definition:** A marriage conducted without the full consent of one or both parties, involving coercion or duress. This is distinct from arranged marriage.

### Safeguarding Context:

- Recognised under the expanded definition of **domestic violence**.
- Victims may be taken abroad or coerced in the UK.
- Duress is never justifiable on cultural or religious grounds.

### Response Strategy:

- Treat as domestic abuse and HBV.
- Ensure confidentiality.
- Carry out individual risk assessments and develop safety plans.

**Further Guidance:** See LSCP procedures on *Responding to Abuse and Neglect* and *Honour-Based Violence*.

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## MALE CIRCUMCISION

**Definition:** Circumcision conducted without clinical indication is termed **non-therapeutic**. The British Association of Paediatric Surgeons advises there are rarely medical justifications for this procedure.

### **Safeguarding Considerations:**

- Parents should be fully informed of the lack of medical consensus and the associated risks.
- The child or young person must be involved in decision-making if deemed competent (Gillick competency / Fraser guidelines).
- Legal clarity on male circumcision is limited.

**Professional Guidance:** Refer to LSCP Practice Guidance on Male Circumcision.

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### **BELIEF IN SPIRIT POSSESSION OR WITCHCRAFT**

**Definition:** Harm arises when children are believed to be possessed by evil spirits, including practices aimed at exorcising or delivering the spirit. Beliefs may include terms such as black magic, kindoki, djinns, obeah, etc.

#### **Risks:**

- Abuse may be physical, sexual, emotional, or through neglect.
- Exorcisms can result in significant harm or death.
- Community or faith leaders may instigate or participate.

#### **Safeguarding Approach:**

- Professionals must act immediately.
  - Follow LSCP Practice Guidance on **Spiritual, Cultural and Religious Beliefs**.
  - Additional resources are available under the *Culture and Faith* section on the LSCP website.
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### **CONCLUSION**

Professionals must always act in the best interest of the child. Harmful cultural practices must not be justified under the guise of tradition, culture, or religion. Interventions should always prioritise safety, support, and legal obligations under UK safeguarding laws.

For detailed procedures and resources, visit the **London Safeguarding Children Partnership website**.

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