

Raising Awareness: Breast ironing in young girls

During recent years there has been increased awareness of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), an operation performed before puberty, during which the female genitals are partly or entirely removed or injured for non-medical reasons and is widely recognised as child abuse. The first UK conviction for FGM occurred in November 2017.

However there appears to be less awareness of breast ironing; a practice that usually involves heating a stone or spoon on a flame, then pressing, massaging or flattening the breast. Some girls are also made to wear a tight strap across the chest.

Breast ironing is often carried out by mothers to delay breasts from developing and is aimed at preventing young girls from attracting male attention.

In February, it was announced that children in secondary education will be taught about FGM. 'Kiri Tunks, joint president of the National Education Union, is now calling for school staff... to be taught how to notice the signs [of breast ironing]. She added that the curriculum should be kept "under review as different areas of practice, custom or abuse come to light".'

Read more in:

BBC news online 26-03-2019: Breast ironing awareness 'needed in school'https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-47695169?ns_mchannel=social&ocid=socialflow_facebook&ns_source=facebook&ns_campaign=bbc_news

Community Care online 08-03-2019: Social workers need empowerment and education to protect girls from FGM abuse <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2019/03/08/social-workers-need-empowerment-education-protect-girls-fgm-abuse/>

The Guardian online 26-01-2019: Breast-ironing: 'the whole community needs an education'
<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/jan/26/uk-authorities-in-denial-of-prevalence-of-parents-breast-ironing-girls>