

Workstream 2: Culture & Faith (Beliefs)

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The focus of the **B-MAG Culture, Faith or Beliefs** work stream is the safeguarding of children and young people, including, though not limited to those impacted by mental health, language, domestic abuse, disabilities, exploitation, and trafficking, in addition to safeguarding priorities affecting BME and migrant communities such as FGM, witchcraft & spirit possession, and radicalism.

In 2018, we continued to explore the subject of Female Genital Mutilation, through research and presentations, including a public seminar we held on 24 April, to highlight additional challenges facing children from the relevant communities, open to a wider set of safeguarding concerns. Alongside presentations and related research from Toks Okeniyi (FORWARD) and Fatuma Farah (PhD student, UEL), a survey by year 12 pupil, Millie Patel, to explore the views of 100 young people sought to answer the question of whether to educate or prosecute a harmful practice that has yielded no successful prosecutions to-date despite legislation introduced in 1989, updated in 2003 and again in 2015.

There has been a strong body of work around issues of witchcraft and spirit possession since the inception of the Culture & Faith group within B-MAG, including national research; *Oakley, Kinmond, Dioum and Humphreys (2016) An Exploration of Knowledge about Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief*. This is augmented by latest research article published in British Journal of Social Work by Professor Stephen Briggs and Dr Andrew Whittaker, entitled 'Protecting children from faith-based abuse through accusations of witchcraft and spirit possession: understanding contexts and informing practice. Laura Hamblin-Opaluwa, PhD student at UEL, continues her research to investigate the abuse of children and young people arising from the practice of faith-based beliefs relating to witchcraft or spirit possession in the UK.

According to the latest Children in Need Census across England for 2017-2018, FGM was mentioned in 940 assessments, a 3% reduction from 970 in 2016-2017. Child abuse linked to faith or belief (CALFB) – defined by the government as witchcraft or spirit possession – has been mentioned in 1,630 assessments, an 11% increase from 1,460 in 2016-2017. The increase in CALFB mentions would suggest that practitioners have an improved understanding of, and able to identify faith-based abuse within child safeguarding. This workstream aims to explore how abuse linked to faith or belief is being addressed in practice, within the child in need process. See additional statistical information from the Children in Need 2017-18 report here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/characteristics-of-children-in-need-2017-to-2018>

Assessments linked to radicalism are not specifically recorded in the Children in Need Census, which would require an agreed definition, albeit may be included in the category for abuse linked to faith or beliefs. Such cases have been heavily influenced by political agendas, and increased media attention, with the impact of anti-radicalisation measures predominantly affecting mothers and children, where their involvement with children's services has continued well beyond normal safeguarding practice and procedures.

A number of such cases are now being considered through the prism of advocacy and children's rights, in addition to the anxieties and ongoing trauma for affected parent and child.

In 2019, we are keen to develop an in-depth view into some of the lesser recognised risks facing children and young people within child safeguarding policies and practices, and particularly for BME or migrant children, who may be disproportionately impacted by language.

Strategic Objectives

- Review and evaluate VCF cases, which include Prevent processes, and assess the implications for practice with BME families
- Promote current knowledge and understanding of FGM and Witchcraft and spirit possession together and separately, in order to improve awareness in practice
- Communicate the impact of current legislation and policy on FGM to improve understanding of the issues in practice
- Explore the recent census of cases of witchcraft and spirit possession data to explore implications for practice, including the prevalence across ethnicities