

Date: 25th November 2024
Our ref: FOI/24/013537/N

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REFERENCE NO: FOI/24/013537/N

I write in connection with your request for information dated 28/10/2024, received by Greater Manchester Police (GMP) for the following information:

Please can you supply me data on how many cases of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) were reported to you between 2000 and 2024.

Result of Searches

Following receipt of your request searches were conducted within Greater Manchester Police (GMP) to locate the requested information and I can confirm the information requested is held by GMP. However, I am not obliged to provide the information requested as exemption applies.

Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires Greater Manchester Police, when refusing to provide such information (because this information is exempt) to provide you, the applicant, with a notice which: (a) states that fact, (b) specifies the exemption in question and (c) states (if that would not otherwise be apparent) why the exemption applies.

The information requested in question 1 is exempt from disclosure by virtue of the following exemption:

Section 31(1)(a)(b) – Law Enforcement

Section 31 is a qualified and prejudice based exemption and as such, subject to a harm and public interest test.

Harm

Any disclosure under FOI is a disclosure to the world and not just to the individual making the request. FGM offences, which falls under the umbrella of honour based violence, occurs within communities of specific demographic trends. To disclose a statistic which would reveal specific details of investigative activity into these offences would undermine the smooth delivery of operational law enforcement as there is potential for community unrest to occur, as well as unrest within family members.

Furthermore, disclosure may reveal identification or misidentification of victims which could lead to further violent offences occurring as well as the potential for victims being removed from their families and taken abroad against their will.

Public Interest Test

Factors favouring disclosure

In this case disclosure of the information would provide openness and transparency relating to this type of offending.

Factors favouring non-disclosure

When the current or future law enforcement role of the force may be compromised by the release of information, the effectiveness of the force will be reduced. In this case, for the reasons outlined in the evidenced harm, the effectiveness of dealing with crimes such as FGM would compromise law enforcement.

To disclose data which could cause community unrest would not be in the public interest and would impact on frontline policing, which is often over stretched. Although there is currently a national ongoing major recruitment of police officers, this will not impact on the day to day policing establishment for quite some time.

The personal safety of individuals, including both the general public and police officers and staff, is of paramount importance to the Greater Manchester Police and must be considered in respect of every release. As stated within the harm a disclosure under Freedom of Information is a release to the world and any disclosure which compromises an individual(s) health and safety is not in the public interest.

Balance Test

As always, the Freedom of Information Act has a presumption of disclosure, unless when balancing the competing public interest factors the prejudice to the community outweighs the benefits. In this case, there is an argument for disclosure, since the public have a right to know that this type of criminal offending is appropriately dealt with by the Police Service. However, this must be balanced against the negative impact these disclosures can make. Any form of abuse is abhorrent and if disclosing information undermines the apprehension of offenders cannot be in the public interest. The health and safety of any individual is of paramount importance to the Police Service as a whole. In this case taking into account the negatives identified above, they outweigh any tangible community benefit and therefore the balance does not favour disclosure at this time.