



European
Commission



“HOW CAN WE SUPPORT WOMEN AFFECTED, IF WE DON’T UNDERSTAND FGM?”

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

MEN SPEAK OUT engages men as key actors in eradicating Female Genital Mutilation in Europe, in particular the UK, Belgium and the Netherlands. The project studied men’s involvement in combating the practice and developed a sensitisation strategy that promoted dialogue on FGM between women and men, trained educators with specific manuals, and addressed broader society’s attitudes through awareness campaigns targeted at men (e.g. video spots and a documentary). Policy recommendations were also issued to relevant EU bodies and international organisations (UN, WHO).

MANY PEOPLE THINK THAT FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM) EXISTS ONLY IN AFRICA, BUT THAT’S NOT TRUE: IT EXISTS IN EUROPE, TOO. IN BELGIUM ALONE, 13.000 WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE AFFECTED, AND MORE THAN 4.000 ARE AT RISK.

Fabienne Richard of GAMS (Groupe pour l’Abolition des Mutilations Sexuelles féminines) has made it the purpose of her life to fight this violence and to support women and girls who have experienced it.

As a young midwife working for Doctors Without Borders in the mid-1990s, she was shocked at the complete lack of information on FGM in the training of medical staff sent to countries in which the practice is common. She also realised that medical staff in Europe are often at a loss for how to speak to and effectively treat women who have experienced this trauma.

„How can we support and assist these women, when we don’t understand all the implications – not just medical,

**NON.
NO.
NEIN.**

#SayNoStopVAW

"We've trained around 500 doctors, nurses and midwives, who play an important role in supporting girls and women affected by FGM."

Fabienne Richard, Executive Director. GAMS Belgium

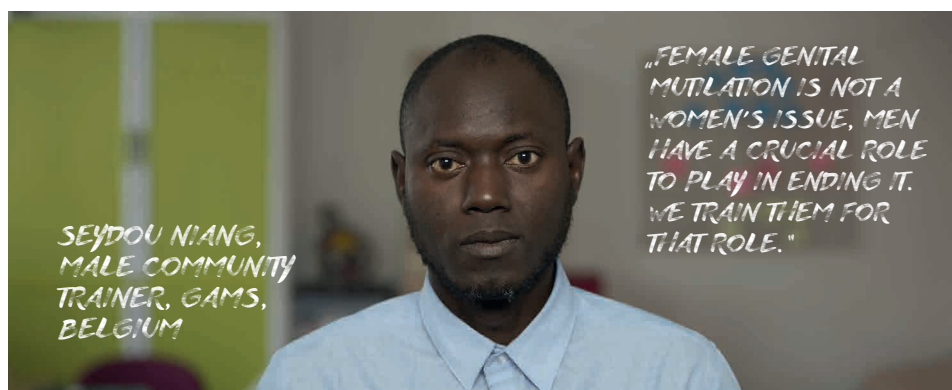
but also psychological, social, sexual, and so on – of their experience?" This has been the question at the core of her work ever since. Joining GAMS and working for the organisation as a volunteer for 13 years before taking up the full-time position of Executive Director, Fabienne has helped change the information landscape in Belgium drastically: GAMS trains 1500 medical staff, social workers, teachers and other professionals every year. They provide information on the consequences of FGM. Most fundamentally, however, they teach doctors, nurses and midwives to approach the women and girls they work with in a sensitive, non-judgemental manner, which is the precondition for any dialogue and support.

Together with Khadia Diallo, the organisation's founder, Fabienne also works with around 2,000 women and girls who are affected by FGM directly every year – a lot of them are refugees. Around 500 receive individual support to build up their confidence; many only rediscover their womanhood, their joy in life and pleasure in their sexuality through the work with GAMS. Working in groups, the women produce information materials and run activities, thus becoming part of the campaign to end FGM and building strong new networks.

The self-confidence and happiness Fabienne and Khadia have brought to countless women in this way is the highlight of their work. Common reactions are: "I wish I had come to talk to you earlier than this" and "I will tell my friend what I have learnt from you; she should also come to GAMS".

Currently, Fabienne also focuses a lot of her attention on international and European collaborations, which allow for the pooling of efforts and exchanges of experiences among EU countries and between them and countries in other parts of the world. Among them is the project MEN SPEAK OUT, which is co-funded by the European Commission. Together with partner organisations in the UK and The Netherlands, she and her colleagues Seydou Niang and Stephanie Florquin have been researching men's knowledge about and attitudes to FGM, and producing training and awareness raising materials especially addressed to men from practicing communities.

As Seydou explains, "It is really important to mobilise men to speak out against this form of violence against women, because they have a role to play but they don't play it yet. By saying no to FGM, they will help us end FGM."



MORE INFORMATION ON THE PROJECT

menspeakout.eu

MORE RELATED PROJECTS

ec.europa.eu/justice/saynostopvaw/projects/