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Our Ref: FOI2018/01018

REQUEST UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 Ref No: FOI2018/01018

I write in connection with your request for information received on 24th February. I note you seek access to the following information:

Under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, please provide me with full answers to each of the following questions:

- 1. How many referrals regarding concerns about Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) did your force receive in a) 2016 and b) 2017?**
- 2. How many arrests regarding concerns about FGM did your force make in a) 2016 and b) 2017?**
- 3. How many reports were submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service a) 2016 and b) 2017, and how many led to charges?**
- 4. How much money has your force spent on FGM operations or projects in a) 2016 and b) 2017?**
- 5. Does your force have an FGM unit or team and if so how many officers and staff are in it?**

I am required by the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (The Act) to handle all requests in a manner that is blind to the identity of the requestor. Any information released in response to a request is regarded as being published and therefore, in the public domain without caveat.

Response – Hertfordshire Constabulary can confirm that it holds information in relation to question 1, 2 and 3 of your request however, I am not obliged to supply the information you have requested. Such information is exempt under the following exemption:

Section 31(1) – Law Enforcement

The Section 31 exemption is a prejudice based qualified exemption, which requires the prejudice (harm) to be evidenced and a public interest test to be carried out.

Prejudice (Harm) test – Section 31

Female genital mutilation has many challenging influences including religious, cultural and social beliefs. This illegal practice against females is a highly emotive subject and not only a national problem but also a global one. In order to ensure Hertfordshire Constabulary delivers effective law enforcement we liaise with various other national agencies to provide suitable support. Not only would police investigations be compromised but any enquiries or investigations that other agencies may be undertaking would also be compromised.

The College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (APP) for Investigations is a public facing document and provides guidance on the key roles and principles on the process of criminal investigation. It includes guidance for both reactive and proactive investigations, from volume crime to major crime, see below link:

<https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/investigations/victims-and-witnesses/>

It clearly states within this APP that when working with victims the success of any investigation depends largely on the accuracy and detail of the material obtained from them. Although the questions submitted for this request are purely statistical, disclosure would undermine the confidentiality expected by a victim who bravely reports to the police that they have been subjected to female genital mutilation.

Public Interest Test - Section 31

Factors favouring complying with Section 1(1)(a)

Female genital mutilation is a matter of continuous public and media interest and a simple internet search revealed many articles relating to FGM. Disclosing the requested information will mean that the public have more awareness of the issue within the Force area, which may lead to the reduction of this crime and more information being received from the public.

Factors against complying with Section 1(1)(a)

FGM is considered a grave violation of the rights of girls and women. It is often in the cases of FGM that it is a girl's parents or her extended family who are responsible for arranging FGM. Please see the link below for more information concerning this fact;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-genital-mutilation-leaflet>

This information, coupled with the challenging influences stated in the prejudice test are barriers victims courageously battle to come forward and report the perpetrators, who are their family and in a position of trust. Disclosure will undermine this built up confidence and empowerment to bravely come forward, as victims will fear the reprisals from perpetrators and their communities who support FGM. This will hinder the Forces ability to prevent and detect crime.

Disclosure is also likely to ensure that perpetrators take further actions to conceal their crime which will place more individuals at risk. It is not a matter of public interest to compromise the safety of others.

Balancing Test

The public has an expectation that any information they provide will be treated with confidence. Anything which places that confidence at risk, no matter how generic it may appear, would undermine any trust or confidence individuals have in the Police Service.

After consideration of the factors of the public interest test carried out in relation to Section 31, the argument is clearly weighed in favour of non-disclosure of the information held. The Forces ability to safeguard potential victims of life threatening crime, prevent and detect time, apprehend offenders significantly outweighs the public interest. Weakening the mechanisms available for law enforcement will also not be of public interest.

Question 4 –

Expenditure is not recorded separately by the Force in relation to FGM. There have been no direct operations or projects during these times. Awareness sessions and a conference for professionals across the multi-agency spectrum have taken place.

Question 5 –

The Constabulary does not have a dedicated FGM unit. All cases are managed by the Joint Child Protection Team.

The data presented in this response is an un-audited snapshot of un-published data sourced from "live" systems and is subject to the interpretation of the original request by the individual extracting the data.

Should you have any further enquiries concerning this matter please do not hesitate to contact me quoting the above reference number.

Yours sincerely

Sonia Chopra-Miah
Information Rights

Hertfordshire Constabulary provides you the right to request an independent review of this response under its review procedure. If you require such a review you must notify us within two months from the date of this letter. After lodging a complaint with Hertfordshire Constabulary if you are still dissatisfied with the decision you may make an application to the Information Commissioner. For information on how to make a complaint please visit their website at <https://ico.org.uk/concerns/> or contact them on 0303 123 1113.