

Female Circumcision in Moscow Clinic Sparks Outrage

By [Daria Litvinova for the Thomson Reuters foundation](#)

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Alexander Avilov / Moskva News Agency

A Moscow clinic which says it performs female genital cutting came under fire on Tuesday as campaigners called for it to be prosecuted for carrying out the harmful practice.

Best Clinic, a small chain of private medical centers in Moscow, said in an advert on its website that it carried out "female circumcision" on girls aged between five and 12, the Russian language Meduza news outlet said on Tuesday.

Meduza published screenshots of the advert, which Best Clinic has since removed from its website.

"This service is on the list of services Best Clinic provides because there is demand from patients with referrals from doctors," the clinic said in a statement on Tuesday.

"Clitoridectomy, a surgical procedure, is being performed only on medical grounds," it said,

adding that it did not circumcise female patients under the age of 18.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which involves the partial or total removal of the female genitalia and can be fatal, is not a crime in Russia.

The United Nations is seeking to end the practice by 2030, which occurs in about 30 countries, mainly in Africa.

FGM was not recognized as a problem in Russia until the Russia Justice Initiative (RJI), a Moscow-based rights group, reported in 2016 that FGM was widespread in the remote mountain villages of Dagestan in southern Russia.

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RJI estimated that tens of thousands of Muslim women had undergone FGM in the volatile North Caucasus region but investigators from the Prosecutor General's office could not find any proof of the practice.

Russian lawmaker Maria Maksakova-Igenbergs introduced a bill criminalizing FGM in 2016 but its status remains unclear.

RJI said on Tuesday that it would ask the Prosecutor General's office to investigate Best Clinic in Moscow.

"This practice, transformed into a commercial service, is being advertized as a procedure appropriate for underaged girls," RJI lawyer Grigor Avetisyan said in a statement.

The Prosecutor General's Office was not immediately available to comment. The health ministry declined to comment, saying that female circumcision is not a medical procedure and is not in their competence.

"For the first time in while, I have been in a complete shock — it is happening in Moscow," Alena Popova, co-founder of the W Project, which lobbies for women's rights, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"Doctors are not allowed to deliberately damage someone's health," she said.

The World Health Organization says about 200 million women and girls worldwide have undergone FGM, which can cause chronic pain, infertility and death from blood loss and infection.

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