

## **Breast Ironing**

**BSCB Guidance** <http://www.bucks-lscb.org.uk/professionals/breast-ironing/>

### **What is breast ironing?**

Breast ironing is practiced in all ten regions of Cameroon and has been reported in Benin, Ivory Coast, Chad, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Togo, Zimbabwe and Guinea-Conakry. The charity CAWODIGO – CAME Women and Girls (<http://www.cawogido.co.uk/index.php>) is concerned that African immigrants have brought breast ironing practice with them to the UK. In their efforts to reduce the number of affected girls and women, CAME provides training for Cameroonian organisations working to protect girls from being abused through breast ironing and supporting families and communities. Girls aged between 9 and 15 have hot pestles, stones or other implements rubbed on their developing breast to stop them growing further. In the vast majority of cases breast ironing is carried out by mothers or grandmothers and the men in the family are unaware. Estimates range between 25% and 50% of girls in Cameroon are affected by breast ironing, affecting up to 3.8 million women across Africa.

### **Why does breast ironing happen?**

The practice of breast ironing is seen as a protection to girls by making them seem 'child-like' for longer and reduce the likelihood of pregnancy. Once girls' breasts have developed, they are at risk of sexual harassment, rape, forced marriage and kidnapping; consequently, breast ironing is more prevalent in cities. Cameroon has one of the highest rates of literacy in Africa and ensuring that girls remain in education is seen as an important outcome of breast ironing.

### **Breast ironing is physical abuse**

Breast ironing is a form of physical abuse that has been condemned by the United Nations and identified as Gender-based Violence. Although, countries where breast ironing is prevalent have ratified the African Charter on Human Rights to prevent harmful traditional practices, it is not against the law.

Breast ironing does not stop the breasts from growing, but development can be slowed down. Damage caused by the 'ironing' can leave women with malformed breasts, difficulty breastfeeding or producing milk, severe chest pains, infections and abscesses. In some cases, it may be related to the onset of breast cancer.

## **Breast Ironing in the UK**

Concerns have been raised that breast ironing is also to be found amongst African communities in the UK, with as many as a 1,000 girls at risk. Keeping Children Safe in Education (2016) mentions breast ironing on page 54, as part of the section on so-called 'Honour Violence'. Staff worried about the risk of breast ironing in their school should speak to the Designated Safeguarding Lead as soon as possible. Schools need to know the risk level within their communities and tackle the risk as appropriate.

Video <https://youtu.be/IOqXWTwnEEE>

Tri.x have issued a paper with further information and links regarding this practice [http://www.trixonline.co.uk/website/news/pdf/policy\\_briefing\\_No-164.pdf](http://www.trixonline.co.uk/website/news/pdf/policy_briefing_No-164.pdf)