

Plastic surgeons may face female mutilation charges

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Doctors could face criminal charges for allegedly carrying out "designer vagina" operations, it is claimed.

Prosecutors are considering whether to use laws against female genital mutilation in three cases where doctors carried out cosmetic genital surgery on adult women, it was reported last night.

No one has ever been convicted of carrying out FGM in Britain after the first prosecution to reach the courts resulted in acquittal last year. The Crown Prosecution Service faced criticism over that case but is now reported to be considering using the laws against doctors who perform cosmetic operations.

While she was home secretary, Theresa May told MPs that doctors carrying out such surgery without a physical or mental health justification would fall foul of the 2003 Female Genital Mutilation Act. Police are said to have started investigating the issue and files on three cases have been passed to the CPS; two in London and one in Cheshire. The women reportedly paid privately for the surgery.

"So-called designer vagina surgery is classed as FGM when it comes to rules on mandatory reporting," a source told the *Evening Standard*. "The question is

whether it is in the public interest to prosecute."

In September, MPs on the home affairs select committee said there was still ambiguity over the scope of the law, urging the government to state specifically that female genital cosmetic surgery would be a criminal offence.

"We cannot tell communities in Sierra Leone and Somalia to stop a practice which is freely permitted in Harley Street," the committee's report said.

The Royal College of Midwives has also supported an amendment to make clear that female genital cosmetic surgery is illegal. Three years ago the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists said that cosmetic genital operations should not be carried out on girls under 18 after figures showed that hundreds had such surgery on the NHS.

Private clinics were told that they must not mislead women about the outcome of such surgery, with experts citing fears that the porn industry was creating unrealistic expectations of female genitalia.

However, it is thought that the operations are becoming more common. Sinitta, the singer, recently said that she planned to have her own vaginoplasty broadcast online.

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