

## Female Genital Cutting (FGC)

### What is Female Genital Cutting?

Female Genital Cutting (FGC), includes piercing, cutting, removing, or sewing closed all or part of a girl's or woman's external genitals<sup>1</sup>. The practice has many names around the world. It is known as female genital mutilation (FGM), female circumcision, sunna, khatna, excision, and many others. It is a human rights violation and a form of gender based violence. This practice is global in scope and cuts across religion, class, race, ethnicity, country, and education level.

### Who is affected by FGC?

Worldwide more than 200 million women and girls have been affected by FGC. The practice is most common in the western, eastern, and north-eastern regions of Africa, in some countries in the Middle East and Asia, as well as among migrants from these areas<sup>2</sup>. In the United States, an estimated 513,000 girls and women have experienced or are at risk of FGC.<sup>3</sup> Girls between the ages of 5 and 14 are most at risk, however, some cultures practice FGC at birth, while others may wait until marriage or a woman's first pregnancy.

### Types of Female Genital Cutting

The World Health Organization defines FGC as all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. There are four main types of FGC<sup>4</sup>:

- Type 1: Often referred to as **clitoridectomy**; this is the partial or total removal of the clitoris or in very rare cases, only the prepuce (the fold of skin surrounding the clitoris).
- Type 2: Often referred to as **excision**; this is the partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora
- Type 3: Often referred to as **infibulation**; this is the narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the labia minora, or labia majora, sometimes through stitching, with or without removal of the clitoris (clitoridectomy).
- Type 4: This includes all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, e.g. pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing the genital area.

## Why is FGC Performed?

FGC is performed for a variety of reasons across the world. The practice dates back centuries in some countries and communities. Some perform the procedure to mark a girl's passage into womanhood and full membership in her community as an adult. Others do it to ensure a daughter's marriageability, as FGC is used to eliminate or reduce sexual pleasure in an effort to limit sexual activity. FGC can be a physical indication and proof of virginity because Type 3 prevents intercourse without physical preparation. Other communities perform it because they believe it is prescribed by their religion. Within individual families, the decision may be based on their community's beliefs, or they will have the procedure done to their daughters because of extreme pressure from family or friends: they could be ostracized if they do not continue the practice.

## What are some of the health effects of FGC?

FGC has no health benefits, and it harms girls and women in many ways<sup>5</sup>. There are numerous emotional and physical consequences of the practice. Some immediate and short-term impacts could be: severe pain; excessive bleeding; infections; urinary problems; shock; and death. In the long term, consequences can include: infertility and complications during childbirth; obstructed menstrual and urinary flow; and pain and decreased satisfaction during intercourse. For more information on the physical and psychological health consequences FGC may have on women, see our resource for medical professionals (link).

## Is FGC Illegal in the United States?

FGC is against the law in the United States. The United States and many other countries consider FGC a violation of women's rights and a form of child abuse. Federal law makes it a crime to perform FGC on a girl younger than 18 or to take or attempt to take a girl out of the United States for FGC. Girls and women who have experienced FGC are not at fault and have not broken any U.S. laws. Many girls had FGC forced on them and had no choice about whether it happened<sup>6</sup>.

## What is being done to end this practice?

Laws have been passed around the world, making FGC illegal. Groups around the United States are working together to end the practice of FGC through community involvement, culturally sensitive programs, resources and education. BRYCS' Community Conversations aims to decrease the likelihood that currently impacted refugee communities will continue this practice, and improve the practical response of service providers who encounter a girl or woman who has undergone FGC or is at risk. If you think a girl is at risk of FGC, contact your state's child protective services agency.

For more information, contact:  
Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services  
3211 4th St NE  
Washington DC, 20017  
Email: [info@brycs.org](mailto:info@brycs.org)  
<http://www.brycs.org>

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Goldberg, H., Stupp, P., Okoroh, E., Besera, G., Goodman, D. and Danel, I. (2016). Female genital mutilation/cutting in the United States: Updated estimates of women and girls at risk, 2012. Public Health Reports, 131, 1–8

<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Office of Women's Health, Department of Health and Human Services <https://www.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/female-genital-cutting>