

What is Female Genital Cutting?

Female genital cutting (FGC) means cutting, removing, or sewing closed some or all of a girl's or woman's private parts. FGC can also be called female circumcision, female genital mutilation, "khatna" or "khafd", or "tahor". FGC can go by many other names not listed here.

Many Countries Oppose and Ban FGC

The World Health Organization (WHO) considers FGC a human rights violation because:

- It violates the rights to health and bodily integrity.
- It is a form of violence and torture against women.
- It violates the rights of children who undergo the practice without agreeing to it.

Who does FGC and why?

FGC may be part of the culture in some countries. FGC was practiced before most major religions began. FGC is not required by any religion; however, some religious sects have adopted the procedure.

There is no medical reason for FGC. FGC has no health benefits and causes harm to girls and women.

Where can I get support to recover from or avoid FGC?

Many religious and community leaders do not support FGC. They can talk with you, your family or community members. Here are some national organizations that educate and support women:

- AHA Foundation: www.theahafoundation.org
- Equality Now: www.equalitynow.org
- Orchid Project: www.orchidproject.org
- Sahiyo: www.sahiyo.com
- Tahirih Justice Center: www.tahirih.org

FGC IS AGAINST THE LAW

If you agree to have FGC done to a girl under the age of 18, you may:

- Be arrested, charged with a crime, and go to prison for up to 15 years,
- Be reported to Child Protective Services and have your child(ren) taken away,
- Be sued by your daughter (up to the age of 28).

If you take a girl out of the United States or Michigan to get FGC, it is still a crime.

HEALTH RISKS OF FGC

Physical harm includes:

- Severe pain
- Serious bleeding
- Infections and diseases
- Difficulty urinating or painful menstrual periods
- Problems during or after childbirth
- Death as a result from some of these problems

Emotional harm includes:

- Anger at the person performing or allowing the procedure
- Trauma, including nightmares and flashbacks
- Depression, fear and feelings of helplessness
- Sexual fears, decreased sexual pleasure

There may be harms that are not listed above. These health risks can be short-term, long-term or both.

BELIEFS VS. FACTS ABOUT FGC

BELIEF

FACT

Only girls who get FGC can pass into womanhood and be considered respectable.

Cultural norms are changing. Other rites of passage into womanhood that do not use FGC are increasingly accepted.

If the clitoris is not cut, it will continue to grow.

The clitoris stops growing after puberty and stays small.

If the clitoris is not cut, it will harm her husband during intercourse.

The clitoris does not cause any harm to her or her husband during intercourse.

If the clitoris is not cut, it will harm the baby during delivery.

The clitoris won't harm the fetus, the baby or the mother. FGC can cause serious complications during childbirth.

If a woman does not have FGC, she will not be able to have children.

FGC has nothing to do with a woman's ability to have children. FGC may make it harder to have a baby because of infections.

If a woman does not undergo FGC, her genitals will smell.

FGC will not make the vagina cleaner.

FGC is a religious duty.

FGC is not supported in any major religious texts and many religious leaders believe that this tradition should stop.

An uncut woman will sleep around and have an uncontrollable sexual desire.

FGC has no effect on a woman's sexual desire, which comes mostly from hormones in the brain. FGC can stop a women from enjoying sex.

Men do not want to stop FGC.

In most countries where data exist, most boys and men think FGC should be stopped.

If FGC is performed by a health care professional, there is no risk of harm.

FGC is a harmful practice and may lead to physical, mental and sexual health problems no matter who does it.

SOURCES

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