

What is Female Genital Cutting?

Female genital cutting (FGC), sometimes called female circumcision or female genital mutilation, means cutting, removing, or sewing closed all or part of a girl's or woman's external genitals for no medical reason.

FGC is sometimes incorrectly identified as a religious practice- it is not. However, it is often a part of the culture in countries where it is practiced. FGC has no health benefits and can cause long-term health problems.

FGC is against the law in Michigan.

Why is FGC Done?

Communities and cultures have different reasons for practicing FGC. Social acceptability is the most common. Families often feel pressure to have their daughter cut so she is accepted by their community. Other reasons include:

- **The desire to ensure a woman remains a virgin until marriage.** Parents believe FGC is in the child's best interest and therefore is an expression of love.
- **Condition of marriage.** In some countries, a girl or woman is cut in order to be considered suitable for marriage.
- **Hygiene.** Some communities believe that the external female genitals that are cut (the clitoris or the labia or both) are unclean.
- **Religious duty,** although no religion's holy texts require FGC.
- **Rite of passage.** In some countries, FGC is a part of the ritual that a girl goes through to be considered a woman.
- **Belief that FGC increases sexual pleasure for the man.**



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WHO IS AT RISK?

3M

Worldwide more than 3 million girls are at risk for FGC annually. Procedures are mostly carried out on young girls between infancy and adolescence, and occasionally on adult women.

200M

More than 200 million girls and women alive today have been cut. FGC is concentrated in 30 countries across Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

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.

Some immigrant families in the US from these countries also practice FGC, or may send their daughters back to their family homeland for FGC. Other immigrant families stop practicing FGC once they are in the US.

Why Do Many Countries Oppose FGC?

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

- It violates the rights to health and bodily integrity
- Is a form of violence and torture against women
- Violates the rights of children who undergo the practice without consent

Because of this many countries have made laws banning the practice of FGC.

BELIEF	BELIEFS VS. FACTS ABOUT FGC	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 mostly comes 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.

Students may demonstrate the following behaviors in the classroom

- Trouble focusing or concentrating
- Withdrawn or angry in class
- Sensitive to noise or being touched
- Fear of being separated from family
- Absenteeism or unexplained medical problems

Factors that might indicate risk for FGC

- a girl's or woman's community or country of origin.
- a girl's father comes from a community known to practice FGC.
- a girl's mother, sibling or other relatives have undergone FGC.
- a family believes FGC is important to cultural or religious identity.
- elders hold strong influence in child rearing practices.
- a girl talks about a long holiday to a country where the practice is prevalent.
- a parent or family member expresses concern that FGC may be carried out on the girl.
- a girl requests help from a teacher or other adult because she is aware that she is at immediate risk of FGC.
- a girl tells a professional that she is to have a 'special procedure' or to attend a special occasion to 'become a woman.'
- a girl talks about FGC to others, for example, a girl may tell other children about it - it is important to consider the context of the discussion.

Indicators that a girl or woman may have been subjected to FGC

- have difficulty walking, standing or sitting;
- have unusual behavior after an absence from school or college;
- spend longer in the bathroom or toilet;
- appear withdrawn, anxious or depressed;
- a girl or woman or family member tells a professional that FGC has taken place
- ask for help but may not be explicit about the problem;
- a girl or woman has frequent urinary, menstrual or stomach problems;
- a girl avoids physical exercise or asks to be excused from physical education; there are prolonged or repeated absences from school or college;
- a girl talks about pain or discomfort between her legs.

How You Can Help

Students may seek support from a teacher or other educational professional; schools are ideally situated to raise awareness of the practice and to safeguard and support girls.

- ✓ Create an 'open environment' where students can discuss FGC openly; support and counselling are provided routinely.
- ✓ Create a culturally sensitive, age appropriate, safe space avoiding stigmatization
- ✓ Do not ask intrusive or insensitive questions (e.g. explicit details of what has happened). It is not a staff members responsibility to investigate.
- ✓ Do not make promises of confidentiality you cannot keep.
- ✓ Provide accurate and clear information to students.
- ✓ Learn strategies for working with at risk and affected individuals and communities
- ✓ Understand your obligations under the law.
- ✓ Language may include:

“Your body will have some changes during puberty (explain); otherwise, it needs to stay the same as when you were born. No one else can change it for you.”

“Sometimes there is a medical need for an operation. If someone talks to you about going away for a celebration, you can ask for help.”

Refer to local or national support organizations listed on the next page.



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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.

Resources for More Information

Organizations

AHA Foundation
www.theahafoundation.org

Sahiyo
www.sahiyo.com

Orchid Project
www.orchidproject.org

Office of Women’s Health US
 Department of Health and
 Human Services
<https://bit.ly/2XFxKVt>

Equality Now
www.equalitynow.org

Tahirih Justice Center
www.tahirih.org

FORWARD Youth
www.forwardyouth.org.uk

World Health Organization
<http://bit.ly/2H1HBj6>

Videos

The Truth About Female
 Genital Mutilation
www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJwP6C5q6Qg

FGM Among Us
www.globalcitizen.org/en/info/fgm-among-us/uk/

US Genital Mutilation Victims:
 It Happens Here
www.youtube.com/watch?v=sb_YPFrWty0

How I Survived Female
 Genital Mutilation
www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTG1MQdINRY

American Woman Who
 Underwent Female Genital
 Mutilation Comes Forward to
 Help Others
www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpwQOIpkkag

Professional Publication

Addressing Female Genital
 Mutilation/Cutting: A Training
 Curriculum for Law Enforcement,
 Educators, and Service Providers
<https://bit.ly/2GmvrQq>

References

Female Genital Cutting: A Fact Sheet from the Office of Women’s Health; US Dept. of Health & Human Services, <http://bit.ly/32kzFC9>; retrieved January 2018
 Khatna, Khafz or Female Genital Cutting; Sahiyo, www.sahiyo.com; retrieved April 2018.

What Is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM?); Forward Youth; www.forwardyouth.org.uk; retrieved April 2018.

Female Genital Mutilation Fact Sheet; World Health Organization (WHO); <http://bit.ly/2XFYPwx>; retrieved September 2017.

Michigan Compiled Laws; www.legislature.mi.gov/ retrieved October 2017.

Engaging Schools on Female Genital Mutilation and Forced Marriage. A Guide for Education Professionals from UK’s Create Youth-Net; <http://bit.ly/2LYafEH>; retrieved October 2018.

FGC IS AGAINST THE LAW

FGC is in the Michigan Public Health Code 333.9159, effective October 9, 2017. The laws:

- Prohibit FGM/C on minors;
- Allow exceptions for necessary medical procedures;
- Apply to parents/guardians who facilitate as well as the individual who performs the procedure;
- Prohibit travel outside the state for the purpose of FGC/M;
- Exclude cultural/ritual reasons and/or consent as a defense;
- Provide a civil cause of action by the victim for physical and emotional damages until the victim reaches age 28;
- Provide for a felony sentence of up to 15 year imprisonment; and
- Provide a basis for termination of parental rights.

Depending on the facts and evidence in each specific case, FGC may amount to parental child abuse or neglect under the Child Protection Law.

- 1931 PA 328 (Michigan Penal Code), MCL 750.136 & MCL 750.136a
- 2017 PA 76, MCL 600.5851
- 2017 PA 78, MCL 600.2978
- 2017 PA 77, MCL 333.9159
- 2017 PA 193, MCL 712A.19b
- Child Protection Laws, MCL 722.621