

## 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.

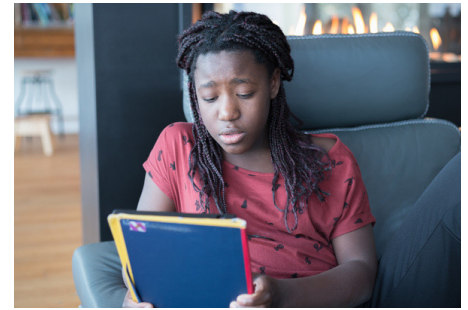
FGC is sometimes incorrectly identified as a religious practice- it is not. However, it is often a part of the culture in countries where it is practiced. FGC has no health benefits and can cause long-term health problems.

**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.

## 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 Can I Communicate with Families About FGC?

The following questions may help when conducting an interview/investigation regarding female genital cutting. Where the term FGC is used please replace with the term the family uses or is familiar with.

### Questions for parents/caregivers:

1. Do you understand what FGC means? What is the term for FGC in your community/family?
2. I know that some girls and women in your country have been cut. What do you think about this? Can you please tell me if FGC has affected you or your family? If yes, do you remember how old you were?
3. Have you had any complications or problems because of it? Are you aware of health services that can support you? (Give details)
4. Are you aware of the health problems that girls and women can have? Explain the short term and long term health and psychological problems.
5. Do you feel that cutting is part of your culture or required by religion? If yes: Tell me about this? Highlight FGC is not required by any religion.
6. What are your family's views on FGC? Explore location and frequency of contact with extended family members.
7. What are the views of your community in the US on cutting?
8. In your community/country why is cutting practiced? Who usually carries out the cutting in your community? At what age are girls usually cut in your country of origin/in your community? In certain communities, FGC is closely related to particular milestones a girl reaches, e.g. puberty. Obtaining this information could potentially tell you when a girl is at risk might be cut.

## How can I help patients who are at risk for or have undergone FGC?

- Provide accurate and clear information to patients.
- Communicate with cultural sensitivity.
- Understand your obligations under the law.
- Learn strategies for working with at risk and affected individuals and communities.
- Refer to local or national support organizations, including:
  - AHA Foundation  
[www.theahafoundation.org](http://www.theahafoundation.org)
  - Equality Now  
[www.equalitynow.org](http://www.equalitynow.org)
  - Orchid Project  
[www.orchidproject.org](http://www.orchidproject.org)
  - Sahiyo  
[www.sahiyo.com](http://www.sahiyo.com)
  - Tahirih Justice Center  
[www.tahirih.org](http://www.tahirih.org)

## Questions for parents/caregivers (continued):

9. If a girl is not cut, what could the consequences be? Would there be pressure from your family or the community to have your daughter(s) cut?
  
10. If left in the care of a grandmother, aunt, or other extended family members, would there be a risk to your daughter(s) of FGC? How do you think you can protect your daughter from being cut? If you felt pressured by your family or community to have your daughter(s) cut, who would you go to for support?
  
11. Are you aware of the laws in Michigan on FGC? Are you aware that it is illegal to take someone out of Michigan to be cut? Are you aware that FGC is illegal and considered child abuse in the Michigan?
  
12. What does your daughter(s) know about FGC? Has your daughter got any friends, siblings or cousins who have been cut?

## Questions for girls:

Below are examples of questions you might like to consider for girls, bearing in mind their age and understanding.

1. Has anyone ever spoken to you about FGC before? If so, who, and what did they say?
  
2. Have you learnt anything at home or in school about the body and your body rights? Explain that a child can say no to something which makes them uncomfortable or sad.
  
3. If you are ever worried about something, who would you speak to?

## Physical and Emotional 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.

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## 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.**

For more information, review:

- 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

## CPS Response to FGC

Knowing that a child has been subjected to FGC may establish reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect has occurred. Anyone may contact Child Protection Services (CPS) to make a complaint of suspected child abuse or neglect.

However, certain individuals are required to make a report to CPS when they suspect child abuse or neglect. Reports can be called into the CPS Centralized Intake at 855-444-3911.

CPS Centralized Intake will assess the allegation and assign eligible complaints for investigation, including coordination with law enforcement, when necessary.

The primary goal of CPS is to protect children from abuse and neglect. CPS is also responsible to preserve family life. CPS decisions and actions in any case depend on objective analysis of facts and evidence and assessment of risk and safety.

- Identify children at risk of being subjected to FGC and responding appropriately to protect them.
- Identify children who have been subjected to FGC and providing appropriate support for them.

## RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

### Organizations

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

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

### Videos

The Truth About Female Genital  
Mutilation  
[www.youtube.com/watch?  
v=WJwP6C5q6Qg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJwP6C5q6Qg)

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FGM Among Us  
[www.globalcitizen.org/en/info/fgm-  
among-us/uk/](http://www.globalcitizen.org/en/info/fgm-among-us/uk/)

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US Genital Mutilation Victims:  
It Happens Here  
[www.youtube.com/watch?  
v=sb\\_YPFrWty0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sb_YPFrWty0)

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American Woman Who Underwent  
Female Genital Mutilation Comes  
Forward to Help Others  
[www.youtube.com/watch?  
v=qpwQOIpkkg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpwQOIpkkg)

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How I Survived Female Genital  
Mutilation  
[www.youtube.com/watch?  
v=sTG1MQdINRY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTG1MQdINRY)

### References

Female Genital Cutting: A Fact Sheet from the Office of Women's Health; US Dept. of Health & Human Services, [www.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/female-genital-cutting](http://www.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/female-genital-cutting); retrieved January 2018.  
Khatna, Khafz or Female Genital Cutting; Sahiyo, [www.sahiyo.com](http://www.sahiyo.com); retrieved April 2018.  
What Is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM?); Forward Youth; [www.forwardyouth.org.uk](http://www.forwardyouth.org.uk); retrieved April 2018.  
Female Genital Mutilation Fact Sheet; World Health Organization (WHO); [www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation); retrieved September 2017.  
Michigan Compiled Laws; [www.legislature.mi.gov/](http://www.legislature.mi.gov/) retrieved October 2017.

### Professional References for FGC

World Health Organization (2018).  
Care of Women and Girls Living  
with Female Genital Mutilation: A  
Clinical Handbook. Geneva: World  
Health Organization. License: CC  
BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO  
<https://bit.ly/2Tk3ON7>

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Social Work Policy Institute. Female  
Genital Cutting; Available at  
<https://bit.ly/2DoXUnX>

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World Health Organization, Sexual  
and Reproductive Health  
[www.who.int/reproductivehealth](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth)

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

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Social Worker is aimed at social  
work practitioners in England and  
Wales. Appendix 5 could be  
adapted for US/Michigan use.  
<http://bit.ly/2vymEFZ>