



A1 HIDDEN ISSUES – INFORMATION FOR FACILITATORS

Revealing female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C): information for facilitators

Tools in this section of *Reveal* provide background information on hidden issues for facilitators. Tools in other sections are designed to be used with communities.

Questions for a facilitator to consider:

Are you aware of FGM/C? What do you know about it? Why is it practised?

Do you know of girls or women who have undergone FGM/C?

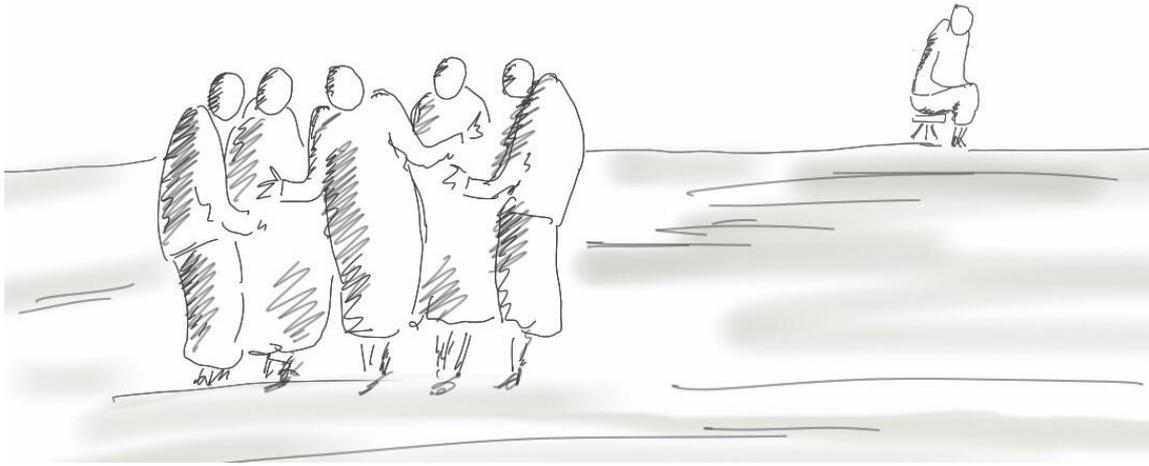
Have these girls or women experienced problems as a result of FGM/C? Are these problems talked about in communities?

FGM/C affects many girls and women across Africa, parts of the Middle East and South Asia. It happens in many communities, and among many groups of people, including church members. The practice of FGM/C involves the partial or total removal of, or damage to, a woman's genitalia. In many cultures, FGM/C is seen as something necessary for a woman to maintain purity, gain respect, reach full maturity, and to become a 'real' woman who will be marriageable and able to participate fully in society. However, it is very harmful. FGM/C can damage the physical and mental health of girls and women. It also limits a woman's ability to bear children safely, and may sometimes lead to death. It is a violation of human rights.



Despite the numbers of girls and women involved, and the harm it causes, there is an overwhelming silence about FGM/C in most cultures where the practice is common. It is a 'hidden issue'. Those who stand against it are often silenced, or shamed into keeping quiet about their opinions and opposition. Girls and women who try and go against traditional cultural practices and avoid being 'cut' often experience social exclusion and discrimination.

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There is an urgent need to break the silence surrounding FGM/C: it is an issue that needs revealing and challenging. Raising the issue involves sensitive discussion over women's most private parts and challenges long held traditions and social norms. While it is usually women who make the practical arrangements about FGM/C for their daughters, maintaining the practice involves both men and women and the wider family and community. Abandoning the practice is therefore not an individual decision; everyone in the community must be involved in order to bring about lasting change. Open discussion is vital for bringing about such change.

What does the Bible say?

God created the human body and female sexuality and declared them both good (Genesis 1). Our bodies are fearfully and wonderfully made; they were created to show God's glory (Psalm 139). To abuse the body and to destroy the ability to appreciate one of God's gifts is an insult to his creation.

It says in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that 'the wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband' (1 Corinthians 7:4). This does not mean that a husband has control over his wife's body, but rather that the sexual organs that women were created with have a key role in a sexual relationship and in reproduction. So these organs should be given honour and respect to the glory of God. Damaging these organs is wrong. Rather, we are to protect our bodies. Paul also writes in 1 Corinthians: 'Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple' (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

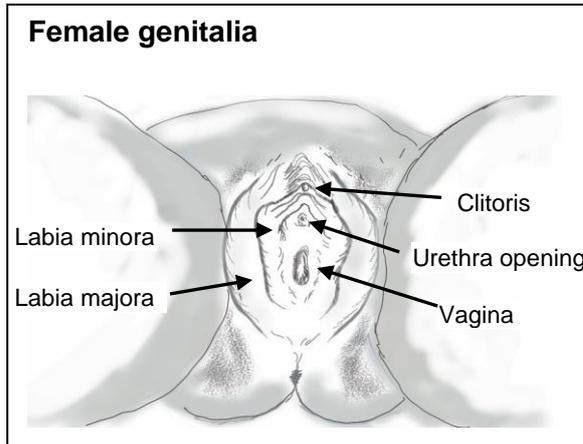
Jesus said that the most important commandments are to: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." and to "Love your neighbour as yourself." (Mark 12:30-3). Romans 13:10 says that 'Love does no harm to a neighbour'. FGM/C is an extremely harmful practice that has no place in God's kingdom.

For Bible studies on this issue, please see **Section B** of *Reveal*.

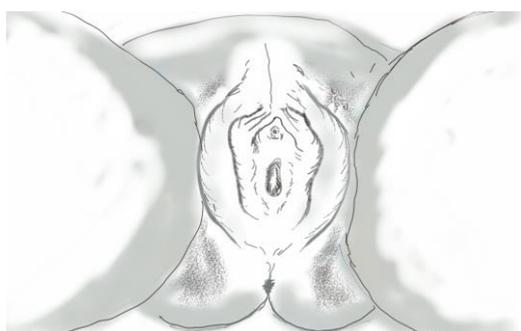
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Understanding FGM/C

FGM/C describes the act of cutting, destroying, or removing some or all of the external parts of the female reproductive organs. This practice has been in existence for more than 2000 years. It is not linked to any one religion. It is estimated that more than 140 million women worldwide have undergone FGM/C, and that more than 3 million girls continue to be 'cut' each year in Africa alone.

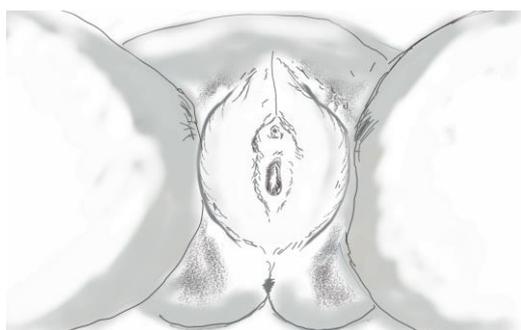


The World Health Organisation (WHO) has classified FGM into four types:



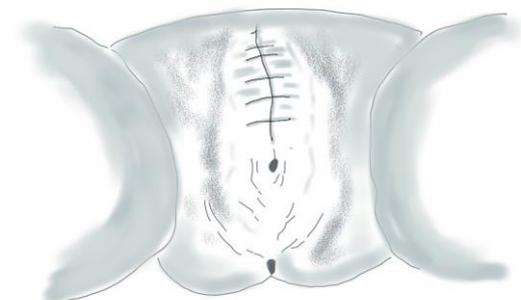
Type 1

Cutting away of part or the whole of the clitoris. This form of FGM is sometimes referred to as 'Sunna'.



Type 2

Cutting away of part or the whole of the clitoris and the inner labia minora (the two folds of skin on either side of opening to the vagina).



Type 3

Cutting away the whole of the clitoris, the inner labia minora and outer labia majora (the outer folds) and then stitching the skin back together, leaving just a small hole for urinating and passing of menstrual blood. This is also known as '*infibulation*'.

Type 4

This covers all other types of destruction and cutting not listed above, such as putting herbs and chemicals in the vagina, prolonging the labia minora and /or clitoris.

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Understanding the difference between male circumcision and FGM/C

It is very important to be clear about the difference between male circumcision and FGM/C. Male circumcision is a religious rite that does not interfere with sexual responsiveness and can bring health benefits (research has shown it lowers men's risk of HIV infection by about 60 per cent). This is why there are problems with using the term 'circumcision' to describe FGM/C: it draws similarities between the two practices, when in fact they are very different.

How does FGM/C affect people?

Short-term effects on girls and women include:

- Very severe pain sometimes leading to fainting.
- Excessive bleeding which can lead to anaemia.
- Infections including tetanus and sepsis due to the use of unsterilised blades.
- The risk of HIV infection through the use of unsterilised blades.
- Damage to the urinary tract.
- Urine retention as a result of being scared or in too much pain to go to the toilet. This can lead to serious health problems.
- Shock and trauma.
- Death, usually through severe or untreated infection or excessive bleeding.

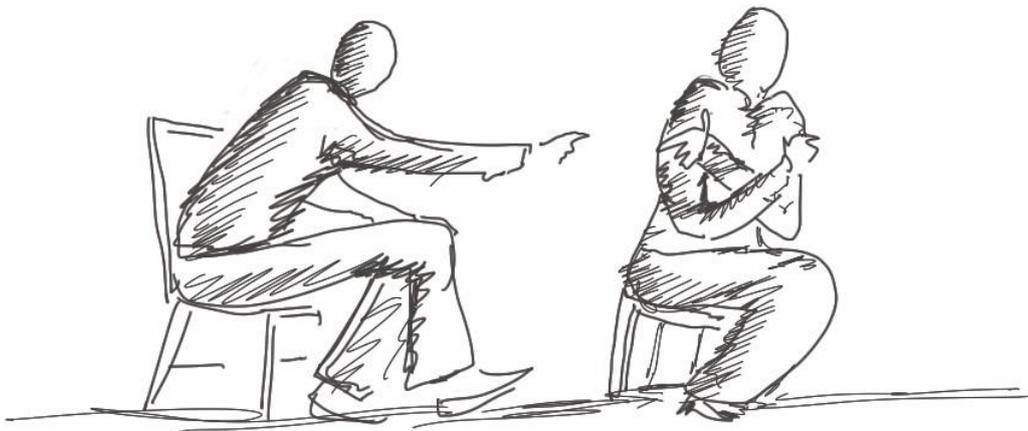


Long-term effects on girls and women include:

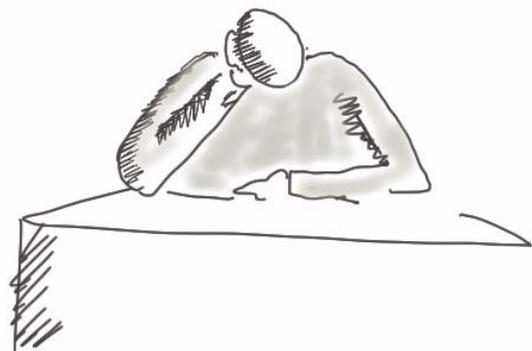
- Permanent deformation of female genital parts and formation of scar tissue.
- Problems during sexual intercourse including pain, lack of desire, dryness and difficulty in reaching orgasm.

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- Numerous complications during childbirth including prolonged labour, tearing of the vaginal opening and excessive bleeding. In some cases prolonged labour, often as a result of hard scar tissue around the vagina, prevents the baby's passage out of the mother. The pressure of the baby's head can damage the mother's soft tissue and create a hole (known medically as a fistula) between the vagina and the bladder and/or rectum. Prolonged labour and fistula can be life-threatening to both the mother and the baby if good medical care is not available.
- Tears between the vaginal wall and the rectum and/or the bladder can lead to incontinence.
- Difficulty in urinating and menstruating, especially if infibulation (type III) has been practiced, which restricts the flow of blood and urine.
- The scarring can sometimes result in the development of embarrassing tissue growth in the genital parts.
- Labia fusion can happen in some women – especially for type II and type III of FGM/C where the flesh around the vagina seals over.
- Psychological impacts, including persistent fear about sexual involvement, even with a loved partner, because of the pain it will cause.

**Impacts of FGM/C on men include:**

- Loss of a wife, daughter or sister if FGM/C leads to death (either immediately or as a result of long-term complications or during obstructed childbirth).
- Difficulty in entering their wife during sexual intercourse, because of narrowing or from scar tissue around her vagina.
- Knowledge that sexual intercourse with their wife is painful. This can be very distressing and upsetting, especially when the desire to enjoy each other is natural and God-given.
- Feeling of being 'inadequate' as a man if they are unable to enjoy their relationship with their wife and make their wife feel satisfied.



FGM/C is an issue that urgently needs revealing and tackling. Only through open discussion of this practice will communities gain full understanding of the risks it presents to millions of girls and women's health and well-being.

Using *Reveal*

Reveal includes tools to help you raise the issue of FGM/C with communities. You can find these in Section **A2**. And you can find Bible studies to explore this issue in **Section B**.



Finding out more

- Tearfund (2016) *Church and community responses to the issue of female genital mutilation or cutting: An Umoja- based guide for facilitators* – forthcoming



Notes

Most of the content in this tool is adapted from Tearfund (2016) *Church and community responses to the issue of female genital mutilation or cutting: An Umoja-based guide for facilitators* - forthcoming

Related tools:

- B – Loving the outcast [B: *Discrimination & inclusion-2*]
- B – Wonderfully made (FGM/C) (Bible study) [B: *Gender & sexual violence-2*]
- B – God's view of women (Bible study) [B: *Gender & sexual violence-3*]
- B – God's view of men (Bible study) [B: *Gender & sexual violence-4*]
- B – Men, women and God (Bible study) [B: *Gender & sexual violence-5*]

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