FACT SHEET
FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)

What is FGM | Effects of FGM | Who Is Affected? | Laws And Law Enforcement | Motivations Behind FGM | FGM And Male Circumcision | Eradicating FGM | Additional Resources | Videos About FGM | News Coverage - FGM
Founded in 2006, Clarion Project is a non-profit, educational organization providing a platform for human rights activists and for challenging Islamic extremism through facts. Clarion Project is a registered 501 (c) (3).

Clarion’s award-winning movies have been seen by over 50 million people around the world. They grapple with issues such as religious persecution, human rights, women’s rights, the dangers of a nuclear Iran and what the concept of jihad means for the West. Our dynamic website, viewed by over 900,000 unique visitors annually, covers breaking news and provides expert analysis on extremism and the struggle for human rights.

Clarion Project’s factsheets and films are used as teaching materials by professional educators, military intelligence, counter-terrorism specialists and human rights activists.

Clarion Project draws together Middle East experts, scholars and human rights activists from diverse backgrounds to promote tolerance, engage in dialogue and challenge extremism.

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“No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.”
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 37a

WHAT IS FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION?

Female Genital Mutilation, known as FGM, includes all procedures involving partial or complete removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It is generally practiced on girls between the ages of four and twelve. In some cultures it is performed as early as a few days after birth or as late as shortly prior to marriage. There are four major types of FGM.

- **Type I**: the removal of the prepuce (the fold of skin surrounding the clitoris) with or without or the entire clitoris (sensitive and erectile part of the female genitals)
- **Type II**: excision of the clitoris with labia minora and partial or total labia majora
- **Type III**: the removal of part or all of the external genitalia and stitching/narrowing of the vaginal opening, leaving a small opening for urine and menstrual blood (infibulation)
- **Type IV** — pricking, piercing or incising of the clitoris and/or labia; stretching of the clitoris and/or labia; cauterization by burning of the clitoris and surrounding tissue; scraping of tissue surrounding the vaginal orifice (angurya cuts) or cutting of the vagina (gishiri cuts); introduction of corrosive substances or herbs into the vagina to cause bleeding or for the purpose of tightening

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3 Dr Trisha Macnai, “Female Genital Mutilation”, BBC January 2011, [Link](http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/physical_health/conditions/female_genital_mutilation.shtml); “Global Consultation on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting”, UN Population Fund, 2008, [Link](http://www.unfpa.org/refworld/docid/4ae6a9c94ba.html)
5 Dr Trisha Macnai, “Female Genital Mutilation”, BBC January 2011, [Link](http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/physical_health/conditions/female_genital_mutilation.shtml)
EFFECTS OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

FGM is a violation of basic human rights. It denies the victim physical and mental integrity, a normal sexual life, freedom from violence and subjugation, and in the most extreme cases, causes death.\(^7\)

FGM serves no medical purposes for its victims. FGM has long been regarded a critical public health issue by the WHO (World Health Organization) and other national and international health organizations because of its harmful physical and mental effects.

Short-term complications may include hemorrhaging, pain, shock, and even death, while long-term complications include formation of cysts, problems with sexual intercourse, and chronic pelvic infection. Studies suggest that FGM is also likely to increase the risk of HIV infection as the same unsterilized instrument may be used on many different girls.

The trauma of FGM often lasts a lifetime and can cause depression and anxiety, among other psychological problems.

All forms of FGM (with perhaps the exception of a symbolic procedure only) reduce or eliminate sexual pleasure for the victim.

Obstetric problems are very common among women who have been mutilated. FGM affects a woman’s ability to give birth naturally as well as a lower rate of survival to babies born to women who have been mutilated. The risk of still births increase significantly for women who have been subjected to FGM.\(^8\)

FGM affects not only women in southern Asia, the Middle East and Africa, but also remains within the immigrant communities in the United States and Europe.\(^9\)

The overwhelming majority of mutilations are performed by untrained lay people, although they are occasionally performed by doctors. Among the instruments used are special knives, razors, scissors, scalpels, and even shards of glass. Anesthesia is rarely used except in some cases when carried out by medical practitioners.\(^10\)

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WHO IS AFFECTED?

- Every year, it is estimated that 3 million girls undergo FGM.\textsuperscript{11}
- FGM is mostly carried out on young girls between infancy and age 15.\textsuperscript{12}
- FGM in the West is mainly practiced in immigrant Muslim communities.\textsuperscript{13}
- In the West, girls and women are often taken to their countries of origin during school holidays in order to be mutilated.\textsuperscript{14}
- FGM has been documented in parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East and is now encountered in immigrant communities in Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States.\textsuperscript{15,16,17,18}
- Between 150,000-200,000 girls in the United States are at risk of being forced to undergo FGM.\textsuperscript{19}
- An estimated 30,000 women living in Germany have been subjected to FGM and 6,000 girls are at risk.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{16} Ben Mathews, “Female genital mutilation: Australian law, policy and practical challenges for doctors.”, The Medical Journal of Australia (MJA). 2011; Volume 194 Number 3 (194:3): 139-141
\textsuperscript{19} “Female Genital Mutilation in the United States” Sanctuary for Families, March 2013, pg. ii http://www.sanctuaryforfamilies.org/storage/sanctuary/documents/report_onfgm_w_cover.pdf
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- In Australia, the Melbourne Royal Women’s Hospital reported approximately 700 cases of women who have undergone FGM.21
- There are approximately 500,000 women and girls living with FGM in the European Union.22
- Researchers estimate that there are 3,000 - 4,000 new FGM cases in the United Kingdom every year.23
- There are currently approximately 86,000 first generation immigrant and refugee women and girls in the United Kingdom who have undergone FGM in their countries of origin.24 25 26

LAWS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

- Performing FGM in the United States is illegal. From the year 2013, the U.S. State Department’s annual country reports will include sections on female genital mutilation.27
- In 2013, United States federal legislation titled, the Transport for Female Genital Mutilation Act, was amended in order to prohibit transporting a girl abroad for the purpose of undergoing FGM. Violation carries up to a five-year jail sentence for perpetrators, the same as that for those who commit FGM in the U.S.28

20 The Fight against Female Genital Mutilation”, DW, http://www.dw.de/the-fight-against-female-genital-mutilation/a-16576486
- On a state level, only **20 American states** have legislation to prevent girls from being taken to another country and having FGM performed on them.\(^{29}\)
- Ten European countries have passed legislation criminalizing FGM: **Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden** and the **United Kingdom.**\(^{30}\)** Canada also outlaws the practice. **\(^{31}\)**
- In the **United Kingdom**, it is illegal to perform FGM. It is also a crime to send a girl overseas to be mutilated. **\(^{32}\)** **However, to date there has not been a single prosecution for FGM in the UK.**\(^{33}\)
- FGM is illegal in **Australia** and each State and Territory has its own legislation. **\(^{34}\)** **\(^{35}\)**
- FGM is also prohibited by the most recent policy of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. **\(^{36}\)**
- In **Sweden**, FGM is prohibited,\(^{37}\) and Swedish citizens have a duty to report information and knowledge about a performed crime of FGM to the police. **\(^{38}\)**

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29 "Female Genital Mutilation", *The Ayaan Hirsi Ali (AHA) Foundation*. 2011
http://theahafoundation.org/issues/female-genital-mutilation/

30 “Responding to Female Genital Mutilation: Striking the Right Balance Between Prosecution and Prevention.” *International Centre of Reproductive Health*, 2009 pg. 12

31 “Frequently Asked Questions on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting”, *United Nations Population Fund*,
http://www.unfpa.org/gender/practices2.htm#21


34 Ben Mathews, “Female genital mutilation: Australian law, policy and practical challenges for doctors.”, *The Medical Journal of Australia (MJA)*. 2011; Volume 194 Number 3 (194:3); pp. 139-144

35 "Fact sheet for health professionals: female genital mutilation.", *The Royal Women's Hospital*. 2009 pg. 2

36 Ben Mathews, “Female genital mutilation: Australian law, policy and practical challenges for doctors.”, *The Medical Journal of Australia (MJA)*. 2011; Volume 194 Number 3 (194:3); pp. 139-144


38 ibid.
MOTIVATIONS BEHIND FGM

FGM is performed for a variety of religious and cultural reasons including:  

- As a means of controlling and subjugating women in cultures where the family’s honor is of utmost importance. FGM is viewed as a means to ensure the daughter’s virginity and that she will not engage in promiscuous behavior. In these societies, a girl who is not “cut” is not accepted in her community, is considered “impure” and is not desirable for marriage.
- To diminish a girl’s sexuality. At the same time, cultures that require this practice often claim that as result of the cutting, the man’s sexual pleasure is enhanced.
- To uphold the integrity of societies where polygamy is practiced. The claim is that since it is nearly impossible for a man to satisfy multiple wives, FGM has the effect of making women less sexually demanding.
- As a traditional rite of passage. In these societies, FGM is associated with being feminine, modest, “clean” and “pure” and thus the ritual is often perpetuated by women themselves.

FGM AND MALE CIRCUMCISION

Male circumcision consists of the removal of the foreskin, leaving the male sex organ itself unaffected. Male circumcision is associated with substantial health benefits. The American Academy of Pediatrics concluded in 2012 that the health benefits of male circumcision clearly outweigh any risks of the procedure.  

In contrast, there is no health benefit associated with FGM. Moreover, FGM damages, destroys and/or removes the woman’s sexual organs, causing severe pain, emotional trauma as well as sexual and reproductive health complications.

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40 [http://www.equalitynow.org/node/866](http://www.equalitynow.org/node/866)

41 [http://www.npr.org/blogs/health/2012/08/27/159955340/pediatricians-decide-boys-are-better-off-circumcised-than-not](http://www.npr.org/blogs/health/2012/08/27/159955340/pediatricians-decide-boys-are-better-off-circumcised-than-not)

42 [http://www.equalitynow.org/node/866](http://www.equalitynow.org/node/866)
**ERADICATING FGM**

Eradicating FGM in the world depends first and foremost on educating people about the devastating physical and emotional consequences of this practice. There are governmental programs, UN agencies, non-profit organizations and some media outlets who are working towards this goal. Some of the efforts focus on the people belonging to the cultural, religious groups promulgating and practicing FGM, and others are aimed at educating the public in Western societies about this issue. Below are links to several campaigns focused on eliminating FGM.

**End FGM: European Campaign | Amnesty International**  
http://www.endfgm.eu/

**Stop FGM Now**  
http://www.stop-fgm-now.com/campaign

**Equality Now**  
http://www.equalitynow.org/fgm

**Forward UK**  
http://www.forwarduk.org.uk/

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

**The AHA Foundation**

Female Genital Mutilation Statutes in the United States and the United Kingdom  

**World Health Organization**

Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation: An Interagency Statement  
OHCHR, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIFEM, WHO  
http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2008/9789241596442_eng.pdf

**UNICEF**  
http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58022.html#fgme
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International Centre of Reproductive Health

London Safeguarding Children Board
http://www.londonscb.gov.uk/fgm/

VIDEOS ABOUT FGM

- Tradition or Torture? | ABC News
  http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/video/tradition-torture-10925475

- Female Mutilation in Britain | CNN

- Concerns Over Female Genital Mutilation in Australia | ABC News

- Female Genital Mutilation - A Sobering Report | Thomson Reuters Foundation

- Summer of Horror for British Muslim Girls | The Guardian

News Coverage - FGM

Clarion Project’s Ongoing News Reports
http://www.clarionproject.org/tag/female%20genital%20mutilation