

Tradition and violence against women

Female genital mutilation FGM/C



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1. Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C)

is gender-based violence.

The WHO defines FGM as the partial or complete removal of the external female reproductive organs or other injuries to the female reproductive organs for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons.

Female genital mutilation is not expressly advocated or promoted by any religion.

FGM and other forms of gender-specific violence have certain things in common:

- They are practised in families or in society
- They tend to be socially legitimised and based on patriarchal standards and values

2. Threatened and affected

... are girls in Egypt, Ethiopia, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Djibouti, Eritrea, Gambia, Ghana, both Guineas, Yemen, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Oman, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Chad, United Arab Emirates, Central African Republic.

FGM is considered a part of cultural identity and has deep roots in the society and traditions of these countries – in some cases for centuries.

FGM/C is performed:

- after birth
- in early childhood when the children are not able to protest or rebel
- as a rite of passage during puberty (often a prerequisite for marriageability)

3. The effects

... are reflected in the physical and mental health of girls and women.

FGM/C is a serious and momentous procedure which can lead to infection, injury of other organs and even death.

- Those affected often suffer all their lives from considerable pain when urinating and during menstruation and sexual intercourse. The natural, pleasurable sensation is lost.
- Complications can occur during childbirth which can lead to the death of mother and child.
- Mentally, FGM can lead to illnesses ranging from anxiety to serious mental disorders.

4. FGM is forbidden in Austria

... and this procedure cannot be consented to, neither by the victim nor by their parents.

It is also a punishable offence to carry out FGM abroad (for example, during a visit to a home country), even if it is not an offence in that particular country.

Punishable are:

- Those who perform the genital mutilation
- Parents who allow FGM to be performed on their daughter
- Doctors who carry out the procedure
- Helpers

Those responsible for deliberate physical injury with serious long-term effects risk up to 10 years in prison.

The limitation period for the act begins when the victim reaches the age of 28.

5. There is no justification

for female genital mutilation.

Although no religion expressly advocates or promotes FGM, social pressure and adherence to the values of the society hinder prevent this behaviour from changing.

Information, communication and education are therefore needed to bring about a change in values, perceptions and behaviour.

A sensitive approach to the culture allows communities to realise themselves that not everything which is legitimised by the culture is also consistent with human rights.

It is important that FGM is not perceived as a necessary and socially desirable rite of passage but as exactly what it is: tradition-based violence.

The African Women's Organisation has compiled a teaching kit: www.african-women.org/documents/kit/TrainingKit_DE.pdf

6. What you can do

... to help an affected or endangered person:

- Take the time to talk to the person concerned and inform them about special women's and youth aid organisations.
- As a teacher, supervisor or trainer, give the person concerned the opportunity to contact a helpline from the school or workplace and, if necessary, arrange for a counselling session during work or school time.
- Stay in touch with the person concerned.
- Discuss how you can stay in touch and which means of communication (email, mobile phone, post) you can use.

7. Shelters in Austria

Bright Future

African women's organisation
1090 Vienna,
Schwarzspanierstrasse 15/1, door 2
Phone: +43 (0) 1 925 15 76
www.african-women.org

FEM Southern Women's Health Centre

Kaiser Franz Josef Hospital
1100 Vienna,
Kundratstrasse 3
Phone: +43 (0) 1 60191-5201
www.fem.at

Orient-Express

Counselling, education and cultural initiative for women
1020 Wien, Schönngasse 15-17/Top 2
Phone: +43 (0) 1 728 97 25
www.orientexpress-wien.com

Women's helpline against violence

Phone: 0800 222 555
www.frauenhelpline.at

Weisser Ring

Weisser Ring
Legal advice for victims
Phone: 0800 112 112
www.weisser-ring.at/opferhilfe

www.bmgf.gv.at

