

INFORMATION FOR YOUNG WOMEN

FEMALE CIRCUMCISION



**WOMEN'S HEALTH
IN THE NORTH**

voice • choice • power

“All girls have the right to control what happens to their bodies and the right to **say NO to circumcision.**”



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WHAT IS FEMALE CIRCUMCISION?

Female circumcision, also known as traditional cutting, is the removal of some or all of the external female genitalia.

Circumcision is a traditional practice that has been done for centuries in various countries. It is usually done by someone who is not medically trained, often by older women who are known by different names like 'circumciser' or 'excisor'. There are different types of circumcision and it is of no health benefit to girls or women; rather it can be harmful to their health.

At least 200 million girls and women alive today have been circumcised.¹ Female circumcision usually happens to girls before they turn 15 years old.

Circumcision is unfair and goes against the human rights of women and girls. Some girls who go through this cutting can have problems with their physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health.

Female circumcision is also known as female genital cutting (FGC).

CIRCUMCISION AND THE LAW

All types of female circumcision are illegal in many countries, including Australia. Someone who does it to another person here in Australia can go to jail for up to 20 years. It is also illegal to take a girl out of Australia to circumcise them.



“At least **200 million** girls and women alive today have been circumcised.”

¹ World Health Organization (2016). Female Genital Mutilation: Fact Sheet. Retrieved January 12, 2017 <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/>

WHY DOES CIRCUMCISION HAPPEN?

Many cultural values and beliefs lead to circumcision.

MYTH	TRUTH
<i>Circumcision controls a woman's sexual behaviour. Uncut women become overly sexually active and flirty.</i>	Circumcision makes no difference to a woman's sexual appetite. Sexual arousal arises from hormones produced by the brain.
<i>An uncircumcised woman is not clean.</i>	Circumcision makes no difference to cleanliness. In fact women who are circumcised may have more problems with their hygiene due to complications that arise.
<i>Circumcision is done due to religion.</i>	The Qur'an, Bible and Torah do not say that women must be circumcised. Millions of Muslims, Christians and Jews do not believe in it.
<i>Uncircumcised girls and women may be socially isolated and not accepted by their community.</i>	About 62% (almost two thirds) of girls and women from countries where circumcision occurs believe that it is wrong and needs to stop.
<i>Being circumcised is necessary to get married.</i>	Many young men are concerned about the effects circumcision will have on their wives or future wives. Many young men don't believe circumcision is needed for a good marriage.

Female circumcision is a **harmful** traditional practice with **no health benefits**.

WHERE IS CIRCUMCISION PRACTISED?

Circumcision is common in parts of Africa.

It also occurs in some communities in the Middle Eastern countries of Yemen, Jordan, Oman and Saudi Arabia, and among some groups in Asia from Malaysia, Indonesia, India and Pakistan.²

In Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States, some immigrant communities are thought to be at risk. While the main risk is when young girls return to their country of origin, there have been cases where FGC has occurred in destination countries.³

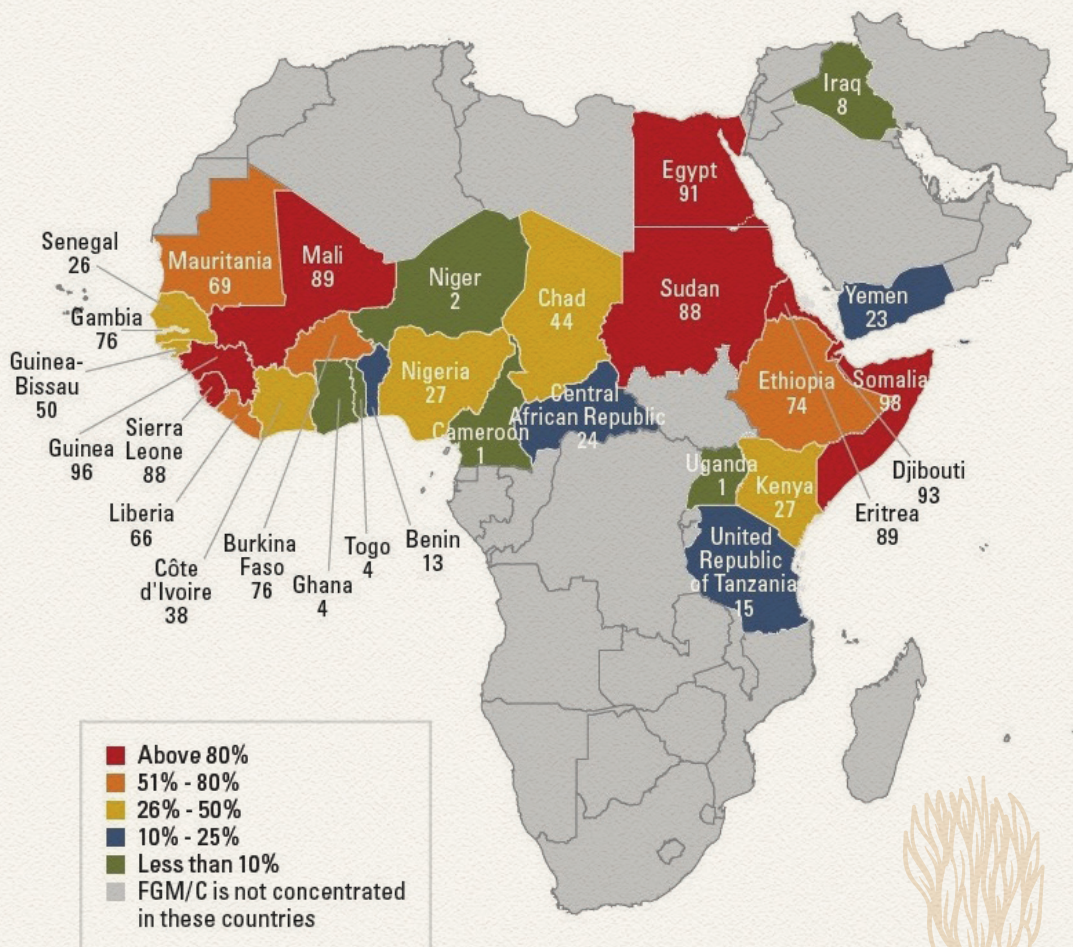
“Some **mothers** do it to their **daughters** so that if she has sex it is painful, so their daughter will stop having sex.”
(Young woman)



2 Womanstats. (2015). Prevalence of female genital cutting. Retrieved January 18, 2017 <http://www.womanstats.org/newmapspage.html>

3 NETFA (2015). The National Education Toolkit for Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting Awareness: Where does FGM/C happen? Retrieved January 18, 2017 <http://www.netfa.com.au/where-does-female-genital-mutilation-cutting-fgm-c-happen.php>

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN AGED 15 TO 49 YEARS WHO HAVE HAD CIRCUMCISION, BY COUNTRY*



Source: United Nations Children's Fund. (2013). Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A statistical overview and exploration of the dynamics of change. UNICEF: New York.

*Circumcision may also be done in some countries not shown on this map including Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Jordan and Oman.



AGE AT WHICH CIRCUMCISION HAPPENS

The age at which circumcision is done changes from community to community. It can be done on girls as young as seven days old, or girls who are teenagers. In some communities, it is done just before marriage or before the birth of the first child.

TYPES OF CIRCUMCISION

TYPE 1 OR SUNNA

This is when the clitoris or the clitoral hood is cut off.

TYPE 2 OR SUNNA

This is when the clitoris and the inner lips of the vagina are cut off.

TYPE 3 OR PHARAONIC

This is when the clitoris, inner lips and outer lips of the vagina are cut and sewn together or sealed, leaving only a small opening to allow urine and menstrual blood to flow through. Type 3 is most common in Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and North Sudan.

TYPE 4

Type 4 is all other harmful practices which could include pricking, piercing, scraping or burning of the genital area.

IMPACT ON WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' HEALTH

Depending on the severity, circumcision can be harmful to health. Some women and girls who go through it can have physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health problems.

Immediately after the circumcision is done (often without any anaesthetic) girls can go into shock because of extreme pain and distress. Severe bleeding and infection can occur from cuts to the area around the genitals. Urine can also get stuck in the body.

In the years after a woman has had a circumcision, it can cause health problems like scarring, wounds, monthly period problems, ongoing pain and ongoing urinary problems. Women and girls who have been circumcised can have problems during medical check-ups or surgery of the genital area. For some women, circumcision can cause problems when having a baby.

When it happens, circumcision can be very scary and painful for girls. Later on they may feel the mental pain and fear whenever something reminds them of it, sometimes when having a medical check-up or when having sex.

Sometimes having sexual intercourse can be difficult. It may be painful and not enjoyable.

“It's not good, absolutely. It's the **worst pain ever** during labour and period.”

(Young woman who has been circumcised)



WHERE TO GET HELP AND INFORMATION

All girls have the right to control what happens to their bodies and the right to say no to circumcision.


Help is available if you've had a circumcision or you're worried that you or someone you know is at risk.

Women's Health In the North FARREP worker

Women's Health in the North (WHIN) has a worker called a FARREP worker (Family and Reproductive Rights Education Program). She helps women and girls who have had a circumcision. If you need any help or advice you can call her on (03) 9484 1666 or email info@whin.org.au

If you or a friend are at risk of having a circumcision

WHIN also gives education and support to women who are at risk of circumcision. If you believe you or someone else is at risk, talk to the FARREP worker at Women's Health in the North (by phoning 9484 1666) or the Royal Women's Hospital (by phoning 8345 3058), your school nurse or school welfare coordinator. If you think you or someone else is at immediate risk please call the police on 000.



“ I wish my parents had **sexual and reproductive health education** back home so circumcision did not happen to me. ”
(Young woman who has been circumcised)

The Royal Women's Hospital FARREP workers and African Women's Clinic

The Women's hospital gives free help for women who have a circumcision. Women are seen by experienced community health and FARREP workers who keep all information private.

The **African Women's Clinic** at the Women's hospital is for women of all ages who have had circumcision or are at risk of circumcision. The clinic supports both pregnant and non-pregnant women to think about options for reversing their circumcision.

At the clinic you can:

- Talk about having a reversal of your circumcision
- Talk about the kind of reversal you will need
- Have the reversal done (usually at the second appointment)
- Prepare for how it will feel after you have had the reversal done
- Get information and support about other women's health issues
- Learn more about useful services in the community
- Talk about your rights and safety

Who will you see at the clinic?

A female nurse will see you in the clinic. The nurse will also do the reversal.

A female FARREP worker will also support you so that you are able to attend the clinic and they can stay with you during your clinic appointments.

Contact details

African Women's Clinic at the Royal Women's Hospital

T: (03) 8345 2000

Ask for an appointment with the African Women's Clinic

FARREP workers at the Royal Women's Hospital

Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

T: (03) 8345 3058

E: farrep.program@thewomens.org.au



*The illustration used in this book
is of the Protea flower which
represents change and hope.*



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