

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION AND CUTTING IN SUDAN

A report by Waging Peace, April 2016

PREVALENCE

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) refers to “all procedures involving partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons”¹. According to UNICEF, FGM/C “is a fundamental violation of human rights.”² Approximately 125 million girls and women have been forcibly subjected to FGM/C in the 29 African and Middle Eastern countries where it is most prevalent.³ Sudan is in the highest category of prevalence for countries with FGM/C, with 37% of girls affected being under the age of 14 (as reported by their mothers)⁴ and ranks fifth in the world for countries practicing FGM/C⁵.

In comparison to some African countries where the practice has decreased, FGM/C has remained established in Sudan⁶. In 2013, 12.1 million women and girls, amounting to 88% of all women and girls in Sudan, had undergone FGM/C.⁷ More than 90% of girls in Northern Sudan are subjected to the most severe form of female genital mutilation, i.e. infibulation.⁸

Reasons cited for undertaking FGM/C are rite of passage, preserving chastity, ensuring marriageability, religion, hygiene, improving fertility, and enhancing sexual pleasure for men.⁹

Given the prevalence of this practice, it is expected that over two million girls born between 2010 and 2015 will have experienced FGM/C by 2030.¹⁰

¹ World Health Organization, *Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation: An interagency statement*, WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIFEM, OHCHR, UNHCR, UNECA, UNESCO, UNDP, UNAIDS, WHO, Geneva, 2008, http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw52/statements_missions/Interagency_Statement_on_Eliminating_FGM.pdf p. 4. (Accessed April 2016).

² Ibid, p. 8. (Accessed April 2016)

³ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Human Rights and Democracy Report 2014, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*, (12 March 2015) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2014/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2014> (Accessed October 2015).

⁴ UNICEF, *UNICEF/Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A Statistical Overview and Exploration of the Dynamics of Change*. Page 27. UNICEF, July 2013. <http://www.childinfo.org/files/FGCM_Lo_res.pdf> (Accessed September 2015); See Also https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/397837/Sudan1.pdf

⁵ <http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/filemanager/files/sudan/facts/fgm.pdf>

⁶ Ibid, Page 95. UNICEF, July 2013. <http://www.childinfo.org/files/FGCM_Lo_res.pdf> (Accessed September 2015).

⁷ Equal Rights Trust Country Report, *In Search of Confluence: Addressing Discrimination and Inequality in Sudan*, Equal Rights Trust, (October 2014), <http://www.equalrightstrust.org/sites/www.equalrightstrust.org/files/ertdocs/Sudan%20-%20In%20Search%20of%20Confluence%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf>, p133 (Accessed November 2015); See also al-Nagar, Samia and Tonnessen, Liv, *Criminalizing FGM in Sudan: A never ending story?*, Chr. Michelsen Institute (2 March 2015), <http://www.cmi.no/news/?1509=criminalizing-fgm-in-sudan-a-never-ending-story> (Accessed November 2015).

⁸ Landinfo, Country of Origin Information Centre. *Female Genital Mutilation in Sudan and Somalia*. Landinfo, Country of Origin Information Centre. December 2008. http://www.landinfo.no/asset/764/1/764_1.pdf. (Accessed September 2015).

⁹ National Center for Biotechnology Information, *Female Genital Cutting, A Persisting Practice*, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2582648/>. (Accessed April 2016).

¹⁰ UNFPA. *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting Country Profile: Sudan*. UNFPA, October 2013. http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/FGMC_SDN_Profile.pdf (Accessed September 2015).

WHO IS AFFECTED

According to the Sudan Household Health Survey 2010, 65.5%¹¹ of girls and women had had any form of FGM/C and in the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey of 2014, 86.6% of women aged 15-49 reported to have undergone any form of FGM/C¹². Girls from age five to nine are considered at risk with 34.6% of this age group having undergone FGM/C. This figure rises to 72.2% for ten to fourteen year olds¹³.

Wealth is not an indicator for prevalence of FGM/C. Sudan is one of the few countries where prevalence is not lower among girls in wealthy households¹⁴. It is performed irrespective of females' social or religious groups¹⁵. It is now even spreading to minority groups which previously shunned the practice as they feel pressurised to undergo the practice to avoid being ostracised, resulting in women who were not cut when children suffering the procedure as adults¹⁶.

Consequences of FGM/C include severe bleeding, ulcers, cysts, infection, inability to urinate and sometimes death. It is also important to mention that FGM/C is not just a one-off procedure but can be inflicted again after each new birth. It has ongoing and serious implications for sexual and reproductive health and causes higher maternal mortality rates¹⁷. "The pain inflicted by FGM does not stop with the initial procedure, but often continues as ongoing torture throughout a woman's life", says Manfred Nowak, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture¹⁸.

MEDICALISATION

A 2013 UNICEF report documenting the practice of FGM/C over the last 20 years was the first to include data on girls under 15 years of age.¹⁹ It also learned that in Sudan the practice is not only carried out by "traditional practitioners", but also by health care providers.²⁰ This practice of "medicalisation" is on the rise in Sudan.²¹ In addition to traditional practitioners and physicians, midwives also practice FGM/C. The UN says that more than half (55%) of cases of FGM/C in Sudan are undertaken by medical professionals.²² A study of midwives in Eastern Sudan conducted in 2012

¹¹ National Ministry of Health and Central Bureau of Statistics, *Sudan Household Health Survey Second Round 2010*, National Ministry of Health, p4 (August 2011) https://mics-surveys-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/MICS4/Middle%20East%20and%20North%20Africa/Sudan/2010/Summary/Sudan%202010%20MICS%20Summary_English.pdf (Accessed October 2015).

¹² Ministry of Cabinet Central Bureau of Statistics, *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014*, Ministry of Cabinet, p214 (April 2015) https://mics-surveys-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/MICS5/Middle%20East%20and%20North%20Africa/Sudan/2014/Final/Sudan%202014%20MICS_English.pdf (Accessed October 2015).

¹³ A situational Assessment of Health Sector Role/Interventions in Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Khartoum state, Sudan <http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/filemanager/files/sudan/rep/fmg.pdf>, p.25 (Accessed April 2016)

¹⁴ UNICEF. *UNICEF/Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A Statistical Overview and Exploration of the Dynamics of Change*. UNICEF, July 2013. <http://www.childinfo.org/files/FGCM_Lo_res.pdf>. P. 40. (Accessed September 2015).

¹⁵ Ali, Abdel Aziem A. *Knowledge and Attitudes of Female Genital Mutilation among Midwives in Eastern Sudan. Reproductive Health* 9 (2012): 23. *PMC*. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3499224/#B5>. (Accessed April 2016).

¹⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/15/fgm-sudan-female-genital-mutilation-spreading>

¹⁷ http://www.unfpa.org/resources/female-genital-mutilation-fgm-frequently-asked-questions#how_fgm_affects_health

¹⁸ <http://www.endfgm.eu/female-genital-mutilation/what-is-fgm/>

¹⁹ UNICEF. *UNICEF/Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A Statistical Overview and Exploration of the Dynamics of Change*. Page 3. UNICEF, July 2013. <http://www.childinfo.org/files/FGCM_Lo_res.pdf> (Accessed September 2015).

²⁰ UNICEF. *UNICEF/Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A Statistical Overview and Exploration of the Dynamics of Change*. Page 3. UNICEF, July 2013. <http://www.childinfo.org/files/FGCM_Lo_res.pdf> p.14. (Accessed September 2015);

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/guidelines/gtg-53-fgm.pdf>

²¹ UNFPA and UNICEF. *2014 Annual Report of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting*. Page 53. UNFPA and UNICEF, 2015. http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA_UNICEF_FGM_14_Report_PDA_WEB.pdf. (Accessed September 2015).

²² United National Population Fund Female Genital Mutilation FGM Frequently Asked Questions <http://www.unfpa.org/resources/female-genital-mutilation-fgm-frequently-asked-questions>

found that 74% believed FGM/C to be legal and around 76% believed most types of FGM/C are not harmful.²³ These midwives stated they would continue to practice FGM/C for cultural reasons.²⁴

ATTITUDES

In most parts of Sudan, an “uncircumcised girl” is considered “odd and unmarriedable”.²⁵ Additionally, girls undergo FGM/C as a result of experiencing peer pressure and for fear of being stigmatised.²⁶ Undergoing the FGM/C procedure is seen in these communities as adding to a girl’s identity and part of her community membership. Girls are even offered rewards and receive public recognition.²⁷ Amira Azhary at the National Council for Child Welfare in Sudan explains that FGM is linked to marriage in many communities and is considered a cleanliness seen as physical hygiene and moral purity.

The attitudes of some have shifted away from practicing FGM/C in Sudan.²⁸ More than half of Sudanese middle-aged women want FGM/C to be discontinued, double the figure compared to two decades ago. Even with the shift in attitudes of some groups, FGM/C is not criminalised in Sudan and the practice “remains widespread, particularly in rural communities.”²⁹

In some areas, the prevalence of FGM/C is growing and it is thought to be a result of extreme Islamist views, particularly those of the Salafist movement. An NCP government man and known Salafist, Daffalla Hasab Alrousan, is known to support FGM/C and was active in ensuring that Article 10 was removed from the Child Act in late 2009/early 2010. Prominent members of the NCP are increasingly speaking out on TV in favour of FGM/C.

‘INFLUENCERS’

In Sudan, influence on a girl undergoing FGM/C can come from the community as well as close and extended family. It is not uncommon for those outside the immediate family to have an impact on decision-making regarding FGM/C. When asked who the main influencers are on the decision for a girl to have FGM, Basil Daffalla, Former UNICEF Child Protection Officer in Sudan said “The women are key, not the men. Grandmothers hold sway too and their views would supersede the mother’s. Aunts also play a role, especially those on the paternal side of the marriage. In a well-known recent case in North Kordofan, a girl was suffering from a blood condition which made any operation dangerous. Her father forbid her to have FGM but it was performed during his absence under pressure from the child’s aunt, her mother’s sister, who was a midwife. The procedure caused the girl to lose her life.”

Amira Azhary at the National Council of Child Welfare in Sudan says that a grandmother, grandfather or aunt can be influential. For those women who would like to prevent their daughters from

²³ Ali, Abdel Aziem A. *Knowledge and Attitudes of Female Genital Mutilation among Midwives in Eastern Sudan*. *Reproductive Health* 9 (2012): 23. *PMC*. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3499224/#B5>. (Accessed September 2015).

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ Ali, Abdel Aziem A. *Knowledge and Attitudes of Female Genital Mutilation among Midwives in Eastern Sudan*. *Reproductive Health* 9 (2012): 23. *PMC*. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3499224/#B5>. (Accessed September 2015); UNFPA and UNICEF. *Joint Evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): Accelerating Change (2008-2012)*. Page 7. UNFPA and UNICEF, 2013. http://www.unicef.org/evaluation/files/fgmc_sudan_final.pdf (Accessed September 2015).

²⁶ Bedri, Dr. Nafisa M., *Ending FGM/C Through Evidence Based Advocacy*, UN Statistics Gender Division (March 2012) http://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/Jordan_Mar2012/Presentations/Panel%203/Panel%203_6_paper_Sudan_Ending%20FGM.pdf (Accessed September 2015).

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ Simonsen, Sven G., *In Sudan, Taking a Stand Against Female Genital Cutting*, UNICEF, (7 February 2014), http://www.unicef.org/protection/sudan_71891.html (Accessed October 2015).

²⁹ *FGM on decline in Sudan as attitudes shift*, SUDAN TRIBUNE, (12 February 2014), <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article49935> (Accessed October 2015).

undergoing FGM/C, communities make it difficult to do so bringing pressure on the family to perform FGM/C in the belief that the child will be “gossiped about and rumoured to be unacceptable as a wife.” Within these communities, families feel they are expected to cut their daughters and expect that other families are doing so as well.

SUDANESE LAW

There is no national legislation banning the practice of FGM/C³⁰. In 2009, the Sudanese government removed an article from the Child Act that would have criminalised FGM/C, drawing national and international condemnation; as shown in a petition presented in the *Sudan Tribune* online.³¹

More recently in 2012, the Sudanese government claimed to be working on national legislation banning the practice, but they have yet to propose or pass any such legislation. Despite the various regional laws,³² specialists warn this practice continues to grow.³³ Counter to some reports, there is little to no decline in the practice of FGM/C in Sudan.³⁴ Enforcement of these regional laws on the ground is a challenge in itself.³⁵ A 2014 report from UNFPA notes that Sudan’s efforts to tackle the issue of FGM/C – such as ratifying various international human rights agreements – as having little impact, stating: “Despite all these long term efforts, FGM/C in Sudan has continued with little interruption.”³⁶

In her most recent visit to Sudan, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Rashida Manjoo, stated “The silence and the denials, whether by State authorities or many civil society participants, regarding the subject of violence as experienced by women, is a source of concern.”³⁷ In June, legal experts gathered for a conference in Khartoum, the country’s capital, to demand national legislation criminalising the practice of FGM³⁸, but at present there remains no legislation.

According to the Chr. Michelsen Institute, the reason for this is the conservative Salafi movement in Sudan which has claimed that the Sunna version of FGM/C is Islamic and criminalising it would be in opposition to Sharia law. Those who campaigned otherwise were derided as blindly following a Western agenda and their work was obstructed by intimidation and harassment. The final decision to drop Article 13 of the National Child Law which would have banned FGM/C in 2010 came from the President himself³⁹.

³⁰ UNFPA and UNICEF. *2014 Annual Report of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting*. UNFPA and UNICEF, 2015. http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA_UNICEF_FGM_14_Report_PDA_WEB.pdf. (Accessed September 2015).

³¹ Democratic Unionist Party, et al. *Letter to Sudan President on female genital cutting*. Sudan Tribune. 25 February 2009. <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article30281>. (Accessed September 2015).

³² UNFPA and UNICEF. *Joint Evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): Accelerating Change (2008-2012)*. UNFPA and UNICEF, 2013. http://www.unicef.org/evaluation/files/fgmc_sudan_final.pdf (Accessed September 2015).

³³ Elyas, Khalda. *Women's Health: What Is and What Should Be*. Sudan Vision Daily. Sudan Vision Daily, 22 Sept. 2015. <<http://news.sudanvisiondaily.com/details.html?rsnpid=254926>>. (Accessed September 2015).

³⁴ *Female Genital Mutilation: 30 million girls at risk*, (22 July 2013), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-23410858> (Accessed October 2015).

³⁵ Bedri, Dr. Nafisa M., *Ending FGM/C Through Evidence Based Advocacy*, UN Statistics Gender Division (March 2012)http://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/Jordan_Mar2012/Presentations/Panel%203/Panel%203_6_paper_Sudan_Ending%20FGM.pdf (Accessed September 2015).

³⁶ UNFPA. *Ending Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Sudan*. UNFPA. 2014. <http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/filemanager/files/sudan/facts/fgm.pdf>. (Accessed September 2015).

³⁷ UN News Centre. “*The Silence and the Denials*” -- *UN rights expert calls for open dialogue on violence against women in Sudan*. UN News Centre. 27 May 2015. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16013&LangID=E>. (Accessed September 2015).

³⁸ Radio Dabanga. *Legal Experts Demand Sudanese Law Against Female Circumcision*. Radio Dabanga. 26 June 2015. <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/legal-experts-demand-sudanese-law-against-female-circumcision>. (Accessed September 2015).

³⁹ *Criminalizing Female Genital Mutilation in Sudan: A never ending Story?* Chr Michelsen Institute, February 2016. <http://www.cmi.no/publications/file/5726-criminalizing-female-genital-mutilation-in-sudan.pdf>. (Accessed April 2016).

UK APPROACH

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office recognises that the Sudanese community is one of the UK diaspora groups that are most at risk.⁴⁰ Although the Foreign Office states a commitment to supporting efforts to eliminate the practice of FGM/C⁴¹, the fact is that its prevalence has not decreased and its danger is seen even in the UK itself. In September 2015, a Birmingham man was arrested at the airport for attempting to take his 15-year-old daughter to Sudan for an FGM/C procedure.⁴² That same month, a woman was ordered to return her 13-year-old daughter to Britain after she left her daughter with relatives in Sudan who felt FGM/C was acceptable.⁴³ Social workers considered the matter urgent as other women in the family had undergone FGM/C procedures.⁴⁴

Efforts to combat FGM/C in Sudan include The Saleema Communication Initiative (Saleema Initiative), launched in 2008 by the National Council for Child Welfare⁴⁵ and supported by the UK Government. Saleema means 'complete' or 'whole' in Arabic, referring to the state of being that Allah has created. The Saleema Initiative aims to "promote collective abandonment" of FGM/C by stimulating discussion about this issue within communities.⁴⁶ However, this campaign has been met with strong criticism for its vague message.⁴⁷ The campaign does not actually mention FGM/C, but rather says "She is born Saleema, let her grow Saleema".⁴⁸ Other FGM opponents in Sudan claim this ambiguity is the Saleema Initiative's attempt "to avoid clashes with the extremists who do not want to see FGM/C eradicated."⁴⁹ Basil Daffalla, Former UNICEF Child Protection Officer in Sudan, claims this criticism of the Saleema Initiative is justified. Daffalla argues the Saleema Initiative is "one size fits all" and is not localised or community-based and is therefore not an effective way of changing long-standing traditions. Daffalla refers to successful programs in countries such as Senegal which have been grassroots efforts as compared to national media campaigns like the Saleema Initiative. Regretfully, the Saleema Initiative is defensive to criticism rather than responsive to suggestions for improvement.

Waging Peace, April 2016

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⁴⁰ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Human Rights and Democracy Report 2014, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*, (12 March 2015) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2014/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2014> (Accessed October 2015).

⁴¹ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *The Girl Summit - ending female genital mutilation and child, early forced marriage*, (12 March 2015), <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/the-girl-summit-ending-female-genital-mutilation-and-child-early-and-forced-marriage> (September 2015).

⁴² *Father arrested at Gatwick Airport on suspicion of taking daughter to Sudan for FGM*, ITV, (30 September 2015), <http://www.itv.com/news/central/2015-09-30/father-arrested-of-trying-to-force-his-daughter-to-undergo-fgm-surgery/> (Accessed October 2015).

⁴³ *FGM order made to protect Kent girl taken to Sudan*, BBC, (11 September 2015), <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-kent-34213818> (Accessed October 2015).

⁴⁴ *Ibid*

⁴⁵ *Saleema Initiative*. http://saleema.net/index_en.php

⁴⁶ *Ibid*

⁴⁷ Abbas, Reem, *Sudan's FGM Campaign Avoids Using the Term*, WOMEN'S ENEWS, (19 August 2013), <http://womensenews.org/story/genital-mutilation/130818/sudans-anti-fgm-campaign-avoids-using-the-term> (Accessed October 2015).

⁴⁸ *Ibid*

⁴⁹ *Ibid*