

What is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)?

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is the term used to describe different types of mutilation performed on fully normal female genital organs. Just as the term indicates, the mutilation is a violent intervention in the female body.

FGM is a very complex and sensitive subject, which among other things, concerns the role of genital organs, marriage, health, sexuality, women's and children's rights.



Different types of Female Genital Mutilation

The WHO classification of FGM

Type I. Excision of the prepuce and part or all of the clitoris

Type II. Excision of the prepuce and clitoris together with partial or total excision of the labia minora

Type III. Infibulation. Excision of part or all of the external genitalia and stitching/narrowing of the vaginal opening

Type IV. Pricking, piercing, incision, stretching, scraping or other harming procedure on clitoris and or labia



When was FGM started?

FGM is an African practice that is strongly rooted in custom that has existed before Christianity and Islam and is more than 2000 years old.

According to some historians, the practice of FGM was started in Egypt and spread into 28 African countries with migrating people. It can be seen from Egyptian tombs that FGM was practised in Egypt around 1600 B.C.



By what means is the mutilation performed?

The commonest way is for circumcising women to go round villages and perform their operations by:

- Razor blade
- Stone
- A piece of glass
- Knife
- No means of sterilization for cleaning the instruments
- No anesthetics – sometimes the girls are given some kind of drink to help ease the pain.

Increase in HIV/AIDS infection has been seen in little girls. The operation is often performed on many girls on the same occasion and the infection is spread further.



Complications following genital mutilation

- Heavy bleeding; many die
- Urinating takes long time
- Urinary ducts problem; often infected; difficult to keep clean
- Menstruation; often infections, difficult to keep clean, all blood does not come out
- Great pain, damaging the nerves
- Intercourse: Need to open with a sharp object or through intercourse
- Infections
- Difficulties in pregnancy
- Delivery complications; cracks due to scar that reduces elasticity, fistulas, cysts.



Legislation

Sweden has forbidden by law female genital mutilation since 1982.

The punishment was increased in 1998 to a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 10 years of imprisonment for guilty parents and those who perform the operation.

In June 1999, it became harsher. To have one's daughters genitally mutilated outside Sweden became punishable even if it is allowed in the country where it is performed.

It is also punishable not to report the mutilation when one comes to know about it, for example, in day care centres and hospitals.

Legislation that forbids genital mutilation is important, but it should not be overestimated. It can be seen as support. Attitudes change through education, information, debate and constant discussion.

Female genital mutilation is a physical abuse and an offence against human rights.



Facts

- It is estimated that 100 – 150 million women and girls in the world are genitally mutilated.
- 2 million girls are genitally mutilated each year.
- 6 000 girls are genitally mutilated each day.
- 5 000 girls from countries where FGM is practised live in Sweden.
- 2 000 among these are under 7 years of age. These girls are in the risk zone.

(Information from 1999)

