

CSW
(Commission on the Status of Women)
“Addressing the issue of cultural female genital mutilation“

1. General information:

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a harmful cultural practice involving the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia for non-medical reasons. It is internationally recognized as a violation of human rights, specifically the rights of women and girls. Despite global efforts to eradicate FGM, it remains prevalent in several regions, particularly in parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. This report aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the cultural, social, and legal dimensions of FGM and propose actionable strategies for addressing this critical issue.

2. Background:

FGM is deeply rooted in cultural traditions and is often justified on the grounds of religion, social norms, and beliefs about purity, modesty, and marriageability. The practice varies across communities and can range from clitoridectomy (partial or total removal of the clitoris) to infibulation (narrowing of the vaginal opening by creating a seal).

According to UNICEF, over 200 million women and girls alive today have undergone FGM, primarily in 30 countries across Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

The practice is typically carried out on girls between infancy and age 15, often without their consent and under unsanitary conditions, leading to severe health risks. These include chronic pain, infections, childbirth complications, psychological trauma, and, in some cases, death. The social pressure to conform to the practice can be immense, with families fearing ostracization if they do not comply. Several international instruments condemn FGM and call for its abolition. These include:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Efforts to address FGM must consider the deep cultural and social underpinnings of the practice. FGM is often seen as a rite of passage or a necessary preparation for marriage, ensuring a girl's acceptance in her community. Therefore, approaches that do not engage with the cultural context or that directly confront the practice without offering alternatives may be met with resistance.

Eradicating FGM is a complex challenge that requires a multifaceted approach, balancing respect for cultural diversity with the imperative to protect human rights. By engaging with communities, strengthening legal frameworks, and promoting gender equality, the international community can make significant strides toward eliminating this harmful practice.

3. Issues that are likely to arise:

- Cultural Relativism: Some communities view FGM as a cultural practice that should be respected, leading to tensions between universal human rights and cultural rights.
- Lack of Awareness: In some regions, the harmful effects of FGM are not well understood, and it may be perceived as a beneficial or even necessary practice.
- Gender Inequality: FGM is closely linked to broader issues of gender inequality, where women and girls have limited power to make decisions about their own bodies.

4. Main Countries involved:

- Kenya: The enactment of the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act (2011) and the establishment of the Anti-FGM Board have strengthened legal frameworks and community outreach programs to combat FGM. Education campaigns targeting both men and women have been crucial in shifting attitudes.
- Egypt: Although still prevalent, Egypt has seen a decrease in FGM rates due to public awareness campaigns, legal reforms, and the involvement of medical professionals who refuse to perform the procedure.

5. List of questions delegates should ask themselves in regards to the topic:

- How can we balance respect for cultural traditions with the need to protect human rights, particularly in the context of FGM?
- What role should international organizations play in supporting countries that are working to eradicate FGM?
- How can we involve men and boys in the fight against FGM, and why is their involvement important?
- What alternative rites of passage can be promoted in communities where FGM is seen as a necessary cultural practice?
- What are the challenges in enforcing laws against FGM, and how can these challenges be addressed at both the national and international levels?
- How can countries with high prevalence rates of FGM learn from the successful strategies of countries where the practice has been significantly reduced?
- What are the potential unintended consequences of criminalizing FGM, and how can policies be designed to avoid them?

6. Key-terms and explanations:

- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): *A practice involving the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia for non-medical reasons. FGM is often carried out on girls from infancy to age 15 and is associated with various health risks and human rights violations.*

- Cultural Relativism: *The principle that an individual's beliefs and practices should be understood in terms of their own culture. In the context of FGM, cultural relativism can complicate efforts to combat the practice, as it may be defended as a cultural tradition.* Trafficking: *The recruitment, transportation, harboring or receipt of an individual by means of threat or use of force or coercion.*
- Human Rights: *Fundamental rights and freedoms that belong to every person, such as the right to life, freedom, and personal security. FGM is considered a violation of these rights, particularly the rights of women and children.*
- Gender Inequality: *The unequal treatment or perception of individuals based on their gender, often resulting in limited rights, opportunities, and resources for women and girls. FGM is both a result and a reinforcement of gender inequality.*
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): *A set of 17 global goals established by the United Nations in 2015 to address global challenges, including poverty, inequality, and injustice. Goal 5.3 specifically targets the elimination of harmful practices such as FGM.*

7. Useful sources:

<https://www.unicef.org/protection/female-genital-mutilation>

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation>

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

<https://www.tostan.org>

<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook>

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