

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION AND CUTTING IN SUDAN

A report by Waging Peace, October 2015

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, and 37% of the girls affected are under the age of 14.⁴ Reasons cited for undertaking FGM/C are control over a woman’s sexuality, hygiene, gender-based factors, cultural identity and religion.⁵

As compared to other African countries where the practice has decreased, it has remained established in Sudan.⁶ 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 2030.⁷ According to the Sudan Household Health Survey 2010, 88%⁸ of women aged 15-49 had experienced any form of FGM/C where as in 2014, 86.6% of women aged 15-49 reported to have undergone any form of FGM/C⁹ - a minimal reduction. More than 90% of girls in Northern Sudan are subjected to the most severe form of female genital mutilation, i.e. infibulation.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, p. 4

² 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).

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 End FGM European Network, *Why Is It Practised*, End FGM European Network, (2009), <http://www.endfgm.eu/en/female-genital-mutilation/what-is-fgm/why-is-it-practised/> (Accessed October 2015).

⁶ UNICEF. *UNICEF/Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting*, Supra.

⁷ 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).

⁸ National Ministry of Health and Central Bureau of Statistics, *Sudan Household Health Survey Second Round 2010*, Supra.

⁹ Ministry of Cabinet Central Bureau of Statistics, *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014*, Ministry of Cabinet, p14 (April 2015) https://mics-surveys-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/MICS5/Middle%20East%20and%20North%20Africa/Sudan/2014/Key%20findings/Sudan%202014%20MICS%20KFR_English.pdf (Accessed October 2015).

¹⁰ 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).

Wealth is not an indicator for prevalence of FGM/C as 91% of those from the richest sectors of society had undergone FGM/C as compared to 90% of the poorest quintiles¹¹.

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.¹² It was learned that in Sudan the practice is not only carried out by “traditional practitioners”, but also by health care providers, such as physicians and midwives.¹³ This practice of “medicalisation” is on the rise in Sudan.¹⁴ The UN says that more than half (55%) of cases of FGM/C in Sudan are undertaken by medical professionals.¹⁵ This is a rise from 39% in 2010.¹⁶ A study of midwives conducted in 2012 found that 74% believed FGM/C to be legal and around 76% believed most types of FGM/C are not harmful.¹⁷ These midwives stated they would continue to practice FGM/C for cultural reasons.¹⁸ It is also believed that the practice is propagated for financial reasons as FGM/C “is a significant source of income for many midwives”¹⁹.

ATTITUDES

In most parts of Sudan, an “uncircumcised girl” is considered “odd and unmarriageable”.²⁰ Additionally, girls undergo FGM/C as a result of experiencing peer pressure and for fear of being stigmatised.²¹ 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.²²

The attitudes of some have shifted away from practicing FGM/C in Sudan.²³ More than half of Sudanese middle-aged women want FGM/C to be discontinued, double the figure compared to two decades ago. But even with this shift from some groups, FGM/C is not criminalised in Sudan and the practice “remains widespread, particularly in rural communities.”²⁴ The strongest motivation for practicing FGM/C is thought to be social pressures²⁵, although religion also plays

¹¹ UNICEF. *UNICEF/Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting*, supra.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ 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).

¹⁵ United Nations Population Fund, *Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Frequently Asked Questions*, (June 2015), <http://www.unfpa.org/resources/female-genital-mutilation-fgm-frequently-asked-questions> (Accessed October 2015).

¹⁶ National Ministry of Health and Central Bureau of Statistics, *Sudan Household Health Survey Second Round 2010*, Supra.

¹⁷ 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).

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ UNICEF. *UNICEF/Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting*, Supra.

²⁰ Ali, *Knowledge and Attitudes of Female Genital Mutilation among Midwives in Eastern Sudan*, supra; 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).

²¹ 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).

²² *Id.*

²³ 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).

²⁴ *FGM on decline in Sudan as attitudes shift*, SUDAN TRIBUNE, (12 February 2014), <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article49935> (Accessed October 2015).

²⁵ UNFPA. *Ending Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Sudan*. UNFPA. 2014. <http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/filemanager/files/sudan/facts/fgm.pdf>. (Accessed September 2015).

a large part, despite FGM/C not being demanded by the Qu'ran or hadith²⁶. The UNFPA report, *Ending Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Sudan*, says that “supporters of the practice are usually the older women in a Sudanese household... However it is not unusual for girls themselves to ask to be circumcised due to peer pressure.”²⁷ The report goes on to say that whilst there is an overall shift towards support for the abolition of FGM/C, parents fear “that their daughters will not marry or will be socially excluded often outweigh their reasons for abandoning the practice.”

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 it is not uncommon for those outside the immediate family to have an impact on decision-making regarding FGM. 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 2013-2015 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 forbade 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 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” without undergoing the practice.

SUDANESE LAW

There is no national legislation banning the practice of FGM/C.²⁸ 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,²⁹ specialists warn this practice continues to grow.³⁰ Counter to some reports, there is little to no decline in the practice of FGM/C in Sudan.³¹ Enforcement of these regional laws on the ground is a challenge in itself.³² 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

²⁶ Topping, Alexandra, *Muslim youth summit told female genital mutilation is not part of Islam*, (8 October 2014), <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/08/muslim-youth-summit-fgm-islam-gambia> (Accessed October 2015).

²⁷ UNFPA. *Ending Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Sudan*, *supra*.

²⁸ UNFPA and UNICEF. *2014 Annual Report of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme*, *supra*.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ Elyas, Khaldia. *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).

³¹ BBC, *Female Genital Mutilation: 30 million girls at risk*, *The Guardian*, (22 July 2013), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-23410858> (Accessed October 2015).

³² Bedri, *Ending FGM/C Through Evidence Based Advocacy*, *supra*.

interruption.”³³ The Sudanese government removed an article from the Child Act in 2009 that would have criminalised FGM/C, drawing national and international condemnation; as is shown in a petition presented in the *Sudan Tribune* online.³⁴

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.”³⁵ In June 2015, legal experts gathered for a conference in Khartoum, the country’s capital, to demand national legislation criminalising the practice of FGM³⁶, but at present there remains no legislation.

UK APPROACH

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) recognises that the Sudanese community is one of the UK diaspora groups that is most at risk.³⁷ Although the FCO states a commitment to supporting efforts to eliminate the practice of FGM/C³⁸, the fact is the prevalence of FGM/C has not decreased and its danger is 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.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ Social workers considered the matter urgent as other women in the family had undergone FGM/C procedures.⁴¹ Basil Daffalla, Former UNICEF Child Protection Officer in Sudan 2013-2015 agrees that the rate of FGM/C occurring in the European and North American diaspora communities is very high, a fact that is endorsed by the NSPCC opening its first national helpline to listen to those affected⁴² and the West Midlands Police Force appointing its own FGM crime expert who also sits on a Home Office panel⁴³.

Efforts to combat FGM/C in Sudan include The Saleema Communication Initiative (Saleema Initiative), launched in 2008 by the National Council for Child Welfare.⁴⁴ 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

³³ UNFPA. *Ending Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Sudan*, supra.

³⁴ 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).

³⁵ 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).

³⁶ 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).

³⁷ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Human Rights and Democracy Report 2014*, supra.

³⁸ 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).

³⁹ *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).

⁴⁰ *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).

⁴¹ Id.

⁴² Chalabi, Mona, *Female Genital Mutilation: how prevalent is it?*, *The Guardian*, (24 June 2013), <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2013/jun/24/female-genital-mutilation-prevalence-uk> (Accessed October 2015).

⁴³ West Midlands Police, *In Focus; Force determined to break down FGM wall of silence*, West Midlands Police, ((2 October 2015), <http://www.west-midlands.police.uk/latest-news/news2.aspx?id=3593> (Accessed October 2015).

⁴⁴ *Saleema Initiative*. http://saleema.net/index_en.php

discussion about this issue within communities.⁴⁵ However, this campaign has been met with strong criticism for its vague message. The campaign does not actually mention FGM/C, but rather says “She is born Saleema, let her grow Saleema”.⁴⁶ 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.”⁴⁷

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⁴⁵ Id.

⁴⁶ 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> (October 2015).

⁴⁷ Id.