
**An Introduction to FGM/C for Professionals
in the Law Enforcement Sector**

FGM/C Resource





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Introduction

Purpose of this Resource

The purpose of this outreach campaign is to educate law enforcement professionals in their role in addressing female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C). This resource includes sectoral-specific strategies to foster community-based prevention of FGM/C, identify at-risk individuals, and respond to FGM/C survivors and situations in impactful, safe, and culturally appropriate ways. The information provided in this resource is a starting point for law enforcement professionals to learn about how this practice might impact their community and how to best respond.



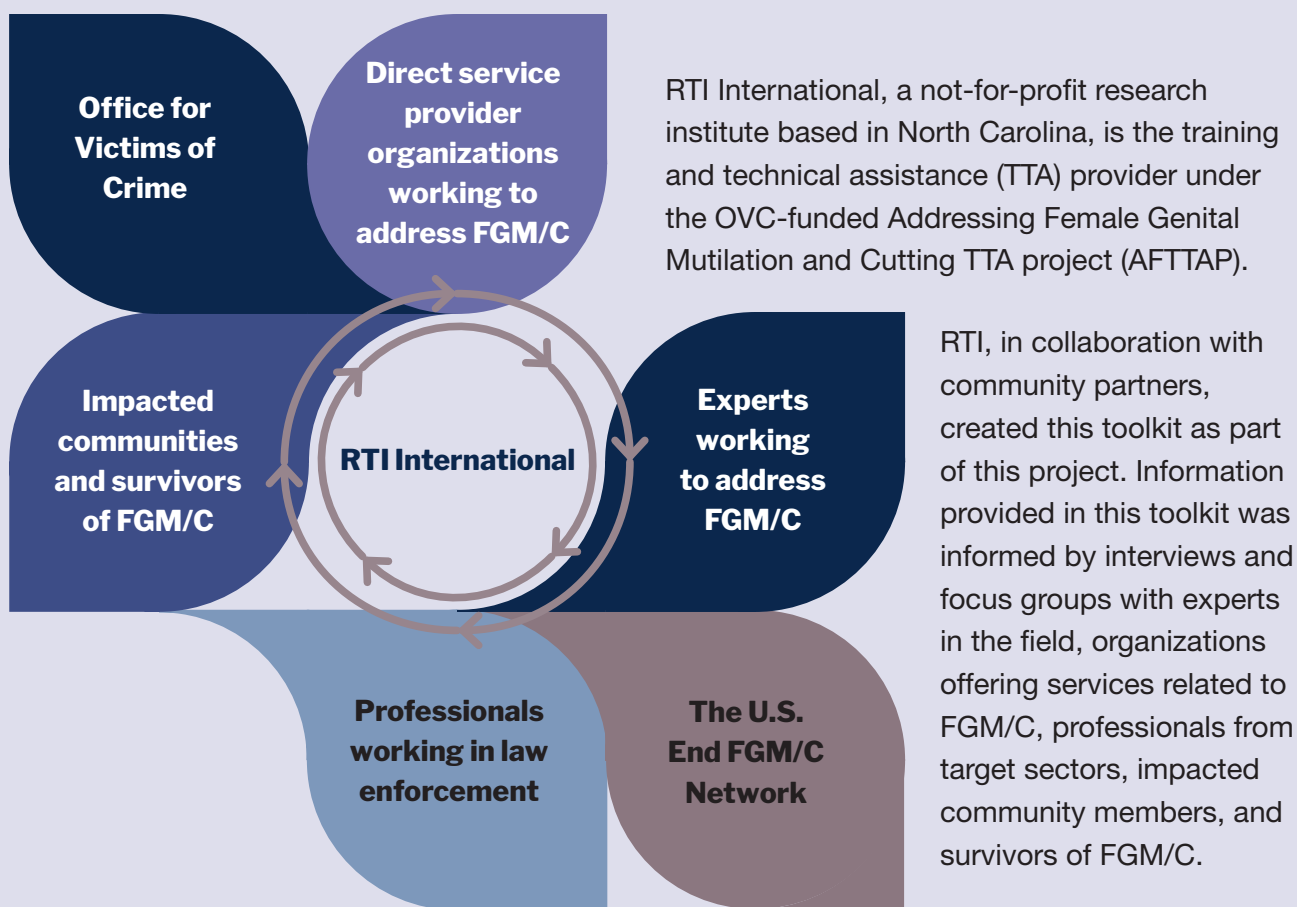
Why Do I Need to Know About FGM/C?

Law enforcement professionals should be aware of FGM/C because it is a crime that may impact the communities they serve. People working in law enforcement must understand FGM/C in order to appropriately serve those who are at risk of or have experienced the practice. Although law enforcement may not be the first or most likely to become aware of instances of FGM/C, these professionals should be aware of the issue so they may respond in culturally sensitive ways and be able to refer impacted individuals to other supportive services in the community. Misinformation and lack of information about this practice can result in survivors not receiving adequate and supportive care. The more informed law enforcement and community members are, the better they can support impacted communities and survivors.

How Was this Resource Created?

This resource was produced by RTI International under 2020-V3-GX-K010, awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Contributing Stakeholders



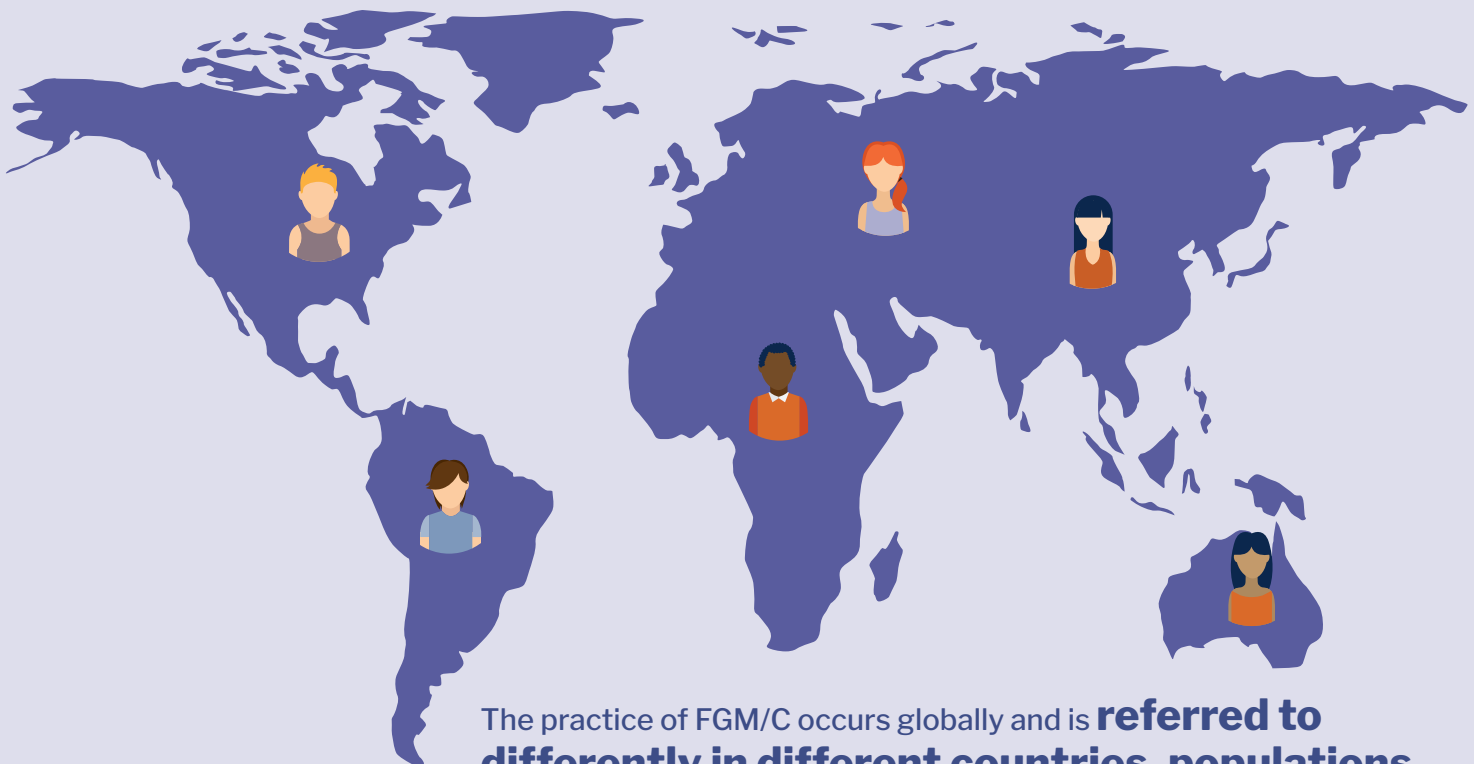
FGM/C 101

What Is FGM/C?

Definition

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines FGM/C as “*all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.*” As noted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), this can refer to procedures that involve “*piercing, cutting, removing, or sewing closed all or part of a girl’s or woman’s external genitals.*”

For more information on FGM/C and the four types of FGM/C, please see the [Supplemental Resources](#) section.



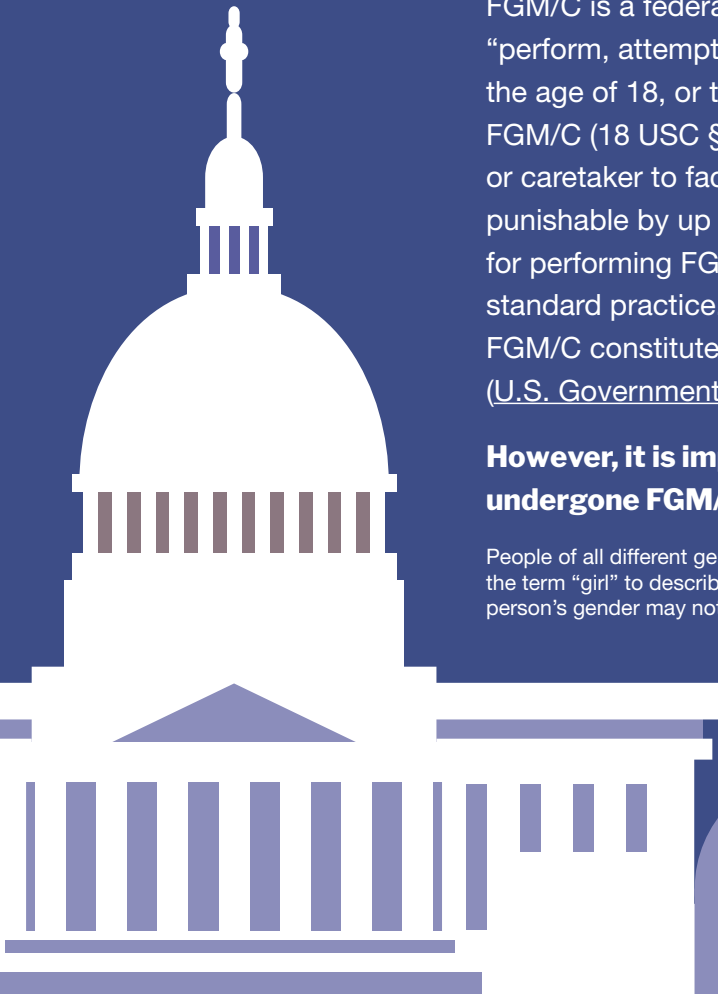
The practice of FGM/C occurs globally and is **referred to differently in different countries, populations, and cultures** (WHO, 2008). For more information on how FGM/C is referred to, please see the [Glossary on Language](#) (AHA foundation).

Federal Law

FGM/C is a federal crime in the United States. **It is against the law to** “perform, attempt to perform, or conspire to perform FGM/C on a girl under the age of 18, or to send her outside the United States for the purpose of FGM/C (18 USC § 116). It is also against the law for a parent, guardian, or caretaker to facilitate or to consent to FGM/C. Violation of the law is punishable by up to 10 years in prison, fines, or both. There is no exception for performing FGM/C because of religion, custom, ritual, tradition or standard practice. Additionally, 41 states have laws criminalizing FGM/C and FGM/C constitutes a form of child abuse, which is prohibited in every state” ([U.S. Government Fact Sheet on FGM/C](#)).

However, it is important to note that a girl or woman who has undergone FGM/C has not broken any laws and is not at fault.

People of all different gender identities can experience FGM/C. However, for brevity, we primarily use the term “girl” to describe people who have experienced FGM/C. It is important to remember that a person’s gender may not align with assumptions about their biological sex organs.



An overview of FGM/C legislation:

1996

Criminalization of FGM/C via U.S. statute [18 U.S.C. § 116](#) (Legal Information Institute, n.d.; U.S. Department of Justice, 2023)

2013

Federal U.S. statute [18 U.S.C. § 116](#) amended to include vacation cutting

2021

[STOP FGM Act of 2020](#) is passed into legislation, which expands the scope of punishable acts and increases the criminal penalty for FGM/C (U.S. GPO, 2020)



Equality Now and the U.S. End FGM/C Network have partnered to co-create an interactive map that details at a “at a state-by-state level the key legal provisions that currently exist regarding FGM/C. In addition, the map provides the latest available data on the number of women and girls impacted by FGM/C in every state:

[US Laws Against FGM - State by State \(map\) - Equality Now.](#)

Who Is Impacted by FGM/C?

Girls and women who live in the countries where FGM/C is practiced, or who are from countries or have family from countries where FGM/C is practiced, often have the highest risk. **Girls are most at risk between birth and 15 years of age**, although it is important to note that the practice varies across communities ([Office on Women’s Health](#)).

How Prevalent Is FGM/C in the United States?

In **2012**, CDC estimated that there were **over half a million** girls and women living **in the United States** who had experienced or were at risk of FGM/C. For more information on FGM/C in the United States, please see the Women’s Health Needs Study: [Women’s Health Needs Study \(WHNS\) \(norc.org\)](#).

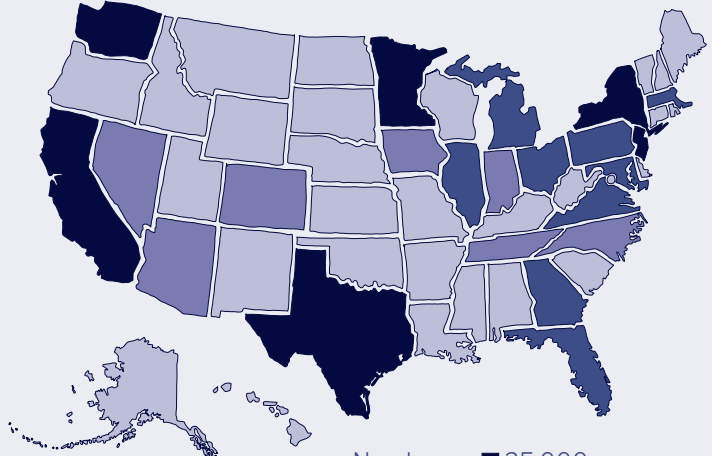
Women and girls living in the United States can be at risk for FGM/C for **“vacation cutting,”**

which refers to the practice of families taking children from their place of residence to another town, city, state, or country to be cut ([Office on Women’s Health](#)).



Although prevalence data for FGM/C is not precise, some agencies have conducted studies to obtain a better understanding of **how often this practice occurs within the United States**. For example, the AHA Foundation released a [study in October 2023](#) that highlights their estimated prevalence of FGM/C by state. To learn more about the estimated prevalence in your state based on the AHA Foundation’s study, please visit the [AHA Foundation’s State by State and DC Fact Sheets](#).

The Number of Women and Girls at Risk of FGM/C Varies Widely Across the States.



Source: [Population Reference Bureau, 2013 data.](#)

Number of Women and Girls at Risk:
■ 25,000 or more
■ 10,000 - 24,999
■ 5,000 - 9,999
□ Less than 5,000

Cultural Considerations

It is important to be familiar with the specific sociocultural norms that exist around FGM/C. Most importantly, FGM/C is not the same for each group that practices it. The practice is not tied to any one specific religion or culture and can be dynamic due to changing cultural norms with immigration to countries such as the United States ([Johnson-Agbakwu & Manin, 2020](#)).

However, many communities that practice FGM/C have some shared context about the practice:

Context to consider around the practice of FGM/C

Acculturation

Acculturation is the dynamic process of adapting new norms, practices, and beliefs after migration/relocation. Some practices or traditions from a person's country of origin, such as FGM/C, are considered stigmatizing or harmful in the United States which can be a difficult dynamic for an individual to navigate.

Taboo Topic

FGM/C is a sensitive and often taboo topic.

Fear of Exploitation

There can be a fear of exploitation or unwanted attention on impacted communities by any negative portrayal of the culture.

Apprehension About Elder Disrespect

FGM/C can be practiced by elders who are esteemed, so there can be apprehension about questioning elders, which is seen as being disrespectful.

Layers of Distrust

There can be layers of distrust in the community due to existing stigma against refugees, experiences of marginalization, and trauma from migration. This can result in reluctance to engage with the health system, law enforcement, and other services.

Exacerbated Stigmatization

Stigmatization of FGM/C can be exacerbated by Islamophobia, racism, and anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States.

Source: [Johnson-Agbakwu & Manin, 2020](#)

What to Do Next

Law Enforcement's Role

Law enforcement professionals should be aware of FGM/C because it is a crime that may impact the communities they serve. Although law enforcement may not be the first or most likely group to become aware of instances of FGM/C, it is important for these professionals to be aware of the issue so they may respond in culturally sensitive ways and be able to refer impacted individuals to other supportive services in the community. It is also important to note that, in addition to the cultural considerations discussed above, members of communities impacted by FGM/C may have a distrust or fear of law enforcement. Therefore, it is key to develop trusting relationships with organizations, community members, and providers who can support impacted individuals in the event of responding to instances of FGM/C.



Did you know?

- There are organizations that specialize in FGM/C and offer training for law enforcement agencies.
- For a list of organizations that specialize in FGM/C, please see Organizations focused on addressing FGM/C and other organizations under the [Additional Resources](#) section.



Actionable Resource

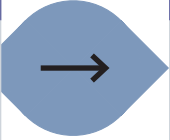
It is critical that individuals who are at risk of or have experienced FGM/C are referred to **culturally specific services** to address the complex context of this practice. If you are not aware of such services in your area, you can call the Asian Women's Shelter's FGM/C support line at **1-877-751-0880**. You will be connected to trained advocates who are knowledgeable on FGM/C and the cultural and social connotations in which it continues.

Examples of FGM/C Scenarios and Law Enforcement Responses

Designed in collaboration with law enforcement professionals and individuals working closely with law enforcement, the following graphic provides examples of various scenarios encountered by law enforcement personnel regarding FGM/C. This resource illustrates real-life scenarios and offers response options for law enforcement professionals. Additionally, it emphasizes crucial considerations for effective and sensitive responses in addressing FGM/C-related incidents.

Scenario 1

Law enforcement professionals were alerted of a family where someone thinks FGM/C has occurred or might occur, but you are unable to connect with the child.

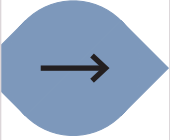


Response 1

Underscore laws to the parent, provide contact information for support service needs related to FGM/C, and obtain parents contact information to be able to follow-up (see Law Enforcement and Legal Resources)

Scenario 2

Someone reported FGM/C occurred while a child was on a trip, and there are other children in the home. The family has plans to travel again.

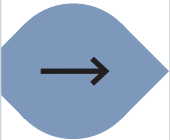


Response 2

Speak to the school and request the child's record. Explore whether there was an observed shift in the child's behavior. Inform the parents of their obligation to not engage in vacation cutting, and provide education.

Scenario 3

Someone reports FGM/C was committed against a child. You respond to the scene and interview the child with support from a forensic interviewer. The child does not share information that would indicate FGM/C, but instead shares details that suggest child sexual abuse.

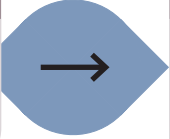


Response 3

Follow local child sexual abuse protocols, including involving child welfare partners.

Scenario 4

Law enforcement professionals were alerted to a confirmed adult victim of FGM/C. The adult does not wish to file a police report at this time.



Response 4

Provide information on their rights as victims of crime and connect them with an advocate.

Response Considerations

Utilize a forensic interviewer

To ensure that those impacted by FGM/C receive trauma informed care, consider engaging a forensic interviewer. Similar to other cases of child abuse, forensic interviewers are equipped with the tools to have conversations with a person impacted by FGM/C with the care and sensitivity required.

Interpretation services

For many communities impacted by FGM/C, English is not the primary language spoken. Offer interpretation services in cases where English is perceived to be a secondary language.

Children from impacted communities who use English as their first language should not be utilized as interpreters. FGM/C is a sensitive and nuanced topic, and relying on children for interpretation puts them in a compromising and uncomfortable situation, especially if family members are the ones promoting the practice. The responsibility of interpretation should be handled by the agency and professional interpretation services as it alleviates burden from impacted communities and ensures clear communication.

Victim advocates

To ensure people impacted by FGM/C are receiving trauma-informed care, consider connecting them with a victim advocate as advocates can help facilitate relationship building with law enforcement and provide additional comfort. Consider advocates staffed by law enforcement agencies, child advocacy centers, sexual assault programs, or immigrant service providers.

Current Law Enforcement Response

The following content from the [Justice Department and Federal Partners Recognize Zero Tolerance Day for Female Genital Mutilation press release](#) on February 6, 2023 details the Justice Department's current law enforcement response to FGM/C.

FGM/C Investigations

“Federal law enforcement authorities actively investigate allegations of FGM within the United States and, if a United States citizen is involved, abroad. The agencies collect tips and leads from the public and partner with non-governmental organizations that will relay information if they suspect a child is in imminent danger of being subjected to FGM or taken out of the country for purposes of FGM.”

FBI Trainings

“The FBI now includes information on FGM in the annual mandatory child abuse training for all FBI employees in hopes of further educating the workforce. The FBI's International Human Rights Unit released educational reports on FGM for pediatricians and for educators.”

Operation Limelight

“Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) launched Operation Limelight USA in 2017, a premier FGM outreach and education program, which has been recognized domestically and internationally as a critical outreach effort to combat FGM by the Women in Federal Law Enforcement and the World Class Policing Awards.”

Reporting FGM/C

“Members of the public who have information about victims or suspected perpetrators engaging in female genital mutilation or other human rights abuses are urged to call the FBI tip line at 1-800-CALL-FBI (800) 225-5324 or the HSI tip line at (866) 347-2423. To submit a tip online, visit tips.fbi.gov or the [HSI online form](#). Tips may be provided anonymously.”

Law Enforcement and Legal Resources

END FGM/C U.S. NETWORK

[Training Manual for Legal Professionals on FGM/C in the U.S.](#) developed by the U.S. End FGM/C Network

This manual is designed to provide legal professionals with tools and knowledge to identify, prevent, and respond effectively to cases of FGM/C. The U.S. End FGM/C Network hopes that the contents of this manual will broaden your understanding of the complexities surrounding FGM/C, offer practical strategies for prevention, and provide guidance on how to effectively represent clients affected by FGM/C.



[Legal Guides for Survivors of FGM In the U.S.](#) developed by AHA Foundation, White & Case LLP and Reed Smith LLP

These legal guides are intended to advise survivors of FGM/C of their legal rights and remedies under the laws of various states. Legal guides have been developed for 13 states. AHA Foundation and their partners are working to create guides for additional states.



[The 2021 STOP FGM Act Report Annual Report of the Attorney General](#) developed by the Department of Justice

This report submitted to the United States Congress pursuant to Section 4 of the ***Strengthening the Opposition to Female Genital Mutilation Act of 2020*** or the STOP FGM Act of 2020 includes information on prevalence of FGM/C, protections available and actions take to protect women and girls, and actions taken by federal agencies..

Supplemental Resources

The U.S. End FGM/C Network

[The U.S. End FGM/C Network](#) (the Network) is a collaborative group of survivors, civil society organizations, foundations, activists, policymakers, researchers, healthcare providers, and others committed to promoting the abandonment of FGM/C in the United States and around the world. The Network functions as a platform that facilitates collaboration and information sharing, empowers grassroots organizations and supports survivors, builds bridges between U.S.-based and international efforts to end FGM/C, influences policies and laws on FGM/C, and leads both national and global efforts to frame the issue of FGM/C in a broad and intersectional manner.

**END
FGM/C**
U.S. NETWORK

The Network is a resource hub of information related to FGM/C. To view their resources, please visit their website: [Resources | U.S. End FGM/C Network](#).

Impacts of FGM/C

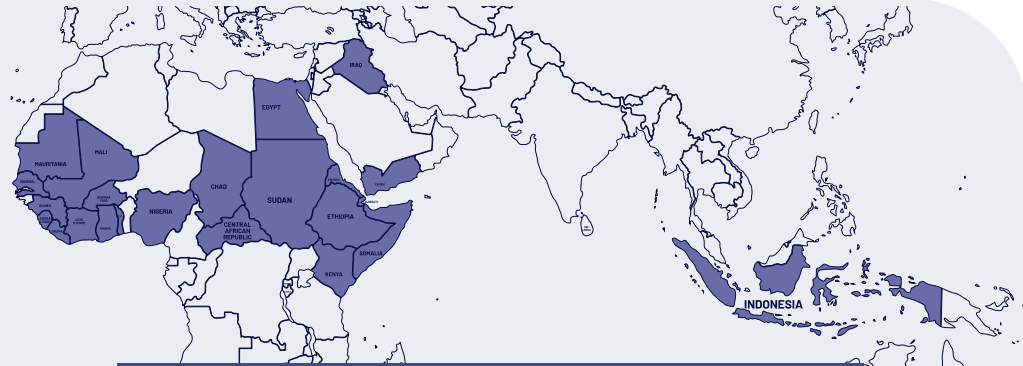
FGM/C impacts several aspects of one's life. The table below details some, but not all, of the high-level physical, mental, and emotional impacts one might face as a result of FGM/C.

Source: [WHO](#).

Physical Impacts	Mental/Emotional Impacts
Infection and/or injury	Depression
Hemorrhage	Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
Urinary tract infections	Guilt
Incontinence	Generalized body pain
Cysts and scarring	Anxiety
Failure to heal	Fatigue
Difficulty in childbirth	Limitations in daily activities
Infertility	Shame
Pelvic inflammatory disease	Poor self-perceived well-being

Impacted Communities

Although prevalence data for FGM/C does not exist, learning more about the different populations who live in your community can provide you with a better sense of those who might be aware of the practice, or potentially impacted by it. [The Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and [UNICEF](#) have documented countries where there is a high prevalence of FGM/C. These are defined as countries with rates of more than 25% of known or suspected FGM/C. It is important to note that FGM/C also occurs outside of these countries, including in the United States.



High FGM/C Prevalence (>25%) Countries

Indonesia	Burkina Faso
Iraq	Central African Republic
Yemen	Chad
Ethiopia	Cote d'Ivoire
Kenya	Somalia
Djibouti	Egypt
Eritrea	Sudan
Guinea	Ghana
Mali	Liberia
Mauritania	Nigeria
Togo	Sierra Leone
Senegal	

Identifying Supportive Services for FGM/C

Your role as law enforcement will often be to refer survivors to supportive services. It is important to understand the various services someone impacted by FGM/C might need. Examples of support service needs related to FGM/C include the following (Akinsulure-Smith & Min, 2021):

- Sexual and reproductive health education
- Gynecological and healthcare services
- Defibulation and other procedures
- Legal services
- Counseling or mental health services
- Supportive services for concurrent issues (e.g., domestic violence, asylum seeking)
- Victim advocate

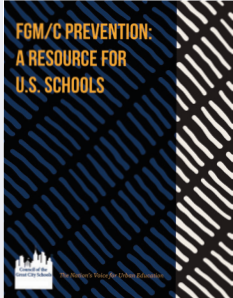
Glossary on Language

The practice of FGM/C is referred to differently depending on the language and culture of those practicing it. The table below, developed by the AHA Foundation, provides an overview of the different terms used to describe FGM/C.

Country	Terms Used for FGM/C	Language	Meaning
Egypt	Thara	Arabic	Deriving from the Arabic word “tahaar” meaning to clean/purify
	Khitan	Arabic	Circumcision: used for both FGM and male circumcision
	Khifad	Arabic	Deriving from the Arabic word “khafad” meaning to lower (rarely used in everyday language)
Ethiopia	Megrez	Amharic	Circumcision/cutting
	Absum	Harrari	Name giving ritual
Eritera	Mekhnishab	Tigreigna	Circumcision/cutting
Kenya	Kutairi	Swahili	Circumcision: used for both FGM and male circumcision
	Kutairi was ichana	Swahili	Circumcision of girls
Nigeria	Ibi/Ugwu	Igbo	The act of cutting: used for both FGM and male circumcision
	Sunna	Mandingo	Believed to be a religious tradition/obligation by some Muslims
Sierra Leone	Sunna	Soussou	Believed to be a religious tradition/obligation by some Muslims
	Bondo	Temenee/ Mandingo/ Limba	Integral part of an initiation rite into adulthood
	Bondo/ Sonde	Mendee	Integral part of an initiation rite into adulthood
Somalia	Gudiniin	Somali	Circumcision: used for both FGM and male circumcision
	Halalays	Somali	Deriving from the Arabic word “halal” (i.e., “sanctioned”): implies purity. Used by Northern and Arabic speaking Somalis
	Qodiin	Somali	Stitching/tightening/sewing refers to infibulation

Source: [AHA Foundation](#)

Additional Resources



[Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting \(FGM/C\) In the United States: A Study of the Prevalence, Distribution, and Impact of FGM/C in the U.S., 2015-2019](#) created by Sean Callaghan and the AHA Foundation



World Health Organization

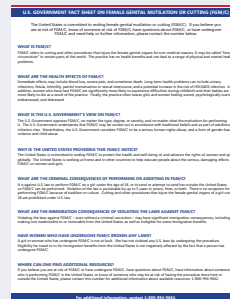
[Female Genital Mutilation Key Fact Sheet](#) created by the World Health Organization



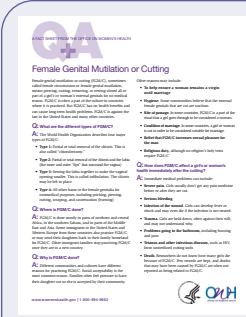
[FGM/C Related Resource Directory](#) created by the AHA Foundation



[FGM/C: An Educational Toolkit for Providers and Survivors](#) developed by RAHMA, Milken Institute of Public Health at George Washington University



[The U.S. Government Fact Sheet on Female Genital Mutilation or Cutting](#)



**A Fact Sheet
from the Office on
Women's Health**



**Survivor Support
Resources** created
by Sahiyo

Organizations focused on addressing FGM/C:

- [U.S. Network to End FGM/C](#)
- [Global Women's P.E.A.C.E. Foundation](#)

**Organizations that currently have or have
previously had FGM/C-focused programming:**

- [AHA Foundation](#)
- [International Institute of Minnesota \(IIM\)](#)
- [Sauti Yetu](#)
- [US Together](#)
- [Asian Women's Shelter](#)
- [African Cultural Alliance of North America](#)
- [African Family Health Organization](#)
- [Sanctuary for Families](#)
- [Colorado Department of Human Services](#)
- [Milken Institute School of Public Health at the George Washington University \(GWU\)](#)

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