FGM in Egypt

Country Briefing

www.thegirlgeneration.org
ABOUT THIS BRIEFING

This country briefing provides up-to-date and easy-to-use facts and figures about Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Egypt.

It aims to support activists, campaigners and grassroots organisations with their advocacy, education and awareness-raising work, as well as giving a quick overview of the facts for journalists and international organisations working on the issue. It compliments existing information about FGM in Egypt; and aims to synthesise and bring key information together into one place.

This briefing is an outcome of The Girl Generation’s desk review and consultation with experts and stakeholders in Egypt, and brings in the latest research available from other sources. Analysis and recommendations reflect the views of stakeholders in Egypt, not of The Girl Generation alone.

IN THIS BRIEFING

- Egypt at a glance
- FGM Classifications in Egypt
- FGM in Egypt - the numbers
- Prevalance of different types of FGM
- Who is performing FGM and why
- National laws and policies
- National framework
- Communication on FGM
- Emerging issues and trends
- Gaps and opportunities

ABOUT THE GIRL GENERATION: TOGETHER TO END FGM

The Girl Generation is a communications initiative, providing a global platform for galvanising, catalysing and amplifying the Africa-led movement to end FGM, building on what has already been achieved. We seek to inspire organisations and individuals, especially youth, across the most affected countries in Africa and beyond, to end FGM in one generation.
WHAT IS FGM?

FGM, also referred to as Female Genital Cutting (FGC), comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. FGM is a form of violence against women and girls. In 2012, the UN passed a resolution calling for a global ban on FGM. The international community recently resolved to eliminate FGM as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Target 5.3).

WHO classification of the types of female genital mutilation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type I</td>
<td>Often referred to as clitoridectomy, this is the partial or total removal of the clitoris (a small, sensitive and erectile part of the female genitals), and in very rare cases, only the prepuce (the fold of skin surrounding the clitoris).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type II</td>
<td>Often referred to as excision, this is the partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora (the inner folds of the vulva), with or without excision of the labia majora (the outer folds of skin of the vulva).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type III</td>
<td>Often referred to as infibulation, this is the narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the labia minora, or labia majora, sometimes through stitching, with or without removal of the clitoris (clitoridectomy).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type IV</td>
<td>This includes all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, e.g. pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterising the genital area.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EGYPT AT A GLANCE

TOTAL POPULATION

10-20 YEARS

40%

90.2 MILLION (2015)

MAJOR LANGUAGES

ARABIC (official)

FRENCH

ENGLISH

RELIGION

CHRISTIAN (Including Coptic, Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican)

ISLAM (STATE RELIGION)

Predominantly Sunni

10%

90%

CHILD MARRIAGE

BEFORE AGE 18

16.6% (2012)

YOUTH LITERACY RATE

MALE

92.4% (2012)

15-24yrs

FEMALE

86.1%
Key Events in the Movement to End FGM

- **1959**: Ministry of Public Health issues a decree against infibulation (Type III FGM).
- **1981**: Egypt ratifies the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, however does so with reservations stating that Islamic Sharia takes precedence.
- **1994**: National Task Force Against FGM established to conduct research, support networks, and encourage dialogue on FGM.
- **1996**: Decree passed forbidding FGM being performed in government hospitals and private clinics. National Council for Childhood and Motherhood launched.
- **2000**: National Council for Childhood and Motherhood develops FGM-Free Village model.
- **2003**: Decree passed forbidding FGM being performed in government hospitals and private clinics. National Council for Childhood and Motherhood launched.
- **2007**: National Council for Women established by Presidential decree. NCW’s aim is to address issues faced by Egyptian women including FGM and other forms of gender-based violence.
- **2008**: Egyptian Ministry of Health and Population (MOHO) bans medical practitioners from performing FGM.
- **2013**: FGM is outlawed in Egypt.
- **2014**: First conviction of a doctor for performing FGM.
- **2016**: Due to a number of deaths of girls undergoing FGM, Penal Code is amended to make FGM a felony and increase penalties.
FGM IN EGYPT - THE NUMBERS

GREATEST NUMBER OF WOMEN & GIRLS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED FGM IN ANY COUNTRY IN AFRICA

87% FGM PREVALENCE

OVER 17 MILLION WOMEN & GIRLS

OVER 70% GIRLS ARE CUT BETWEEN THE AGES OF 9-12 YEARS

FGM IS HIGHLY MEDICALISED

NEARLY 4 OUT OF 5 INCIDENCES OF FGM ARE PERFORMED BY A HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

THIS HAS INCREASED FROM 1 IN EVERY 2 INCIDENCES IN 1995
FGM IN EGYPT - THE NUMBERS

FGM IS HIGHEST AMONGST POOREST GROUPS AND MORE PREVALENT IN RURAL AREAS

54% of the population support the continuation of FGM

Almost half of the population want FGM to end

SUPPORT FOR ENDING FGM HAS INCREASED OVER THE PAST TWENTY YEARS

HOWEVER, PREVALENCE IS NOT DECREASING AT THE SAME RATE AS ATTITUDES TOWARDS FGM
PREVALENCE OF FGM ACCORDING TO PLACE OF RESIDENCE

PREVALENCE BY LOCATION

URBAN GOVERNORATES - 74.5%
CAIRO - 86.9%
LOWER EGYPT - 86.9%
UPPER EGYPT - 92.1%
FRONTIER GOVERNORATES
No reliable data

Map data provided by 28 Too Many
**WHY FGM IS PERFORMED**

FGM is a deeply rooted cultural practice in Egypt.

Community ties are very strong, with a great deal of social pressure attached to the continuation of norms and values, and importance placed on reputation of the family in the eyes of neighbours and the community. FGM is part of these norms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>MARRIAGE</strong></th>
<th><strong>SEXUAL PURITY</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FGM in Egypt is often performed as a means to control women’s sexuality and to ensure that their virginity remains intact until marriage. In many communities, FGM is a prerequisite for marriage as a way to ensure that a woman’s virtue is unblemished.</td>
<td>Important to Egyptian men is the concept of ‘quama’ (protection) and many men view FGM as part of protecting women and their family against women being ‘oversexed.’ According to the Egypt Health Issues Survey 2015, 49% of men and 43% of women believe that FGM prevents adultery.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CULTURE AND MYTH</strong></th>
<th><strong>HYGIENE AND AESTHETICS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FGM continues to be seen as a girl’s initiation into womanhood. Myths surrounding the practice also perpetuate it – one example in Egypt is that a clitoris will grow to the size of a penis if FGM is not performed.</td>
<td>In some communities, external female genitalia are considered dirty and unhygienic, as well as ugly and unappealing. FGM is practiced by some communities in Egypt, particularly more affluent ones, to make genitals ‘neater’ and more aesthetically appealing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>RELIGIOUS REASONS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Although FGM is not endorsed by either Islam or Christianity (the major religions in Egypt), religious doctrine is often used to justify the practice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

A number of government institutions have contributed to the campaign to end FGM in Egypt

**Ministry of Health and Population** – have played an instrumental role in championing the anti-medicalisation movement.

The **UN agencies** supporting the abandonment of FGM are the UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Health Organization. The UNICEF-UNFPA Joint Programme on FGM/C is very active in Egypt.

**The National Population Council** - responsible for developing the National Strategy for the Abandonment of FGM/C in 2013, and for the National Media Campaign in 2015 entitled ‘Enough FGM’, and establishing Doctors Against FGM.

**National Council for Childhood and Motherhood** - enshrined by the Constitution as an independent council working to end FGM.

**NGOs Coalition Against FGM/C** – an expert network founded in 2011, made up of over 120 organisations from various sectors which advocates to end FGM through awareness raising and engagement with the medical sector.

A number of **INGOs** are actively working to end FGM in Egypt and have been doing so for many years; these include Plan International, Caritas, Girls Not Brides, and many others.

**Population Council** has conducted a great deal of research on FGM in Egypt, including its [2016 report] on the medicalisation of the practice.

ANTI-MEDICALISATION

The National Population Council established Doctors Against FGM which works to raise awareness amongst the medical community about the harms of FGM. This approach is gaining some traction across the country. Following a meeting organised by UNFPA and the Arab States Regional Office, which discussed the role of doctors in combatting FGM, the Egyptian Doctors Syndicate released a statement declaring a commitment to take part in community awareness programmes, to educate doctors on the legal framework around FGM and to play an active role in ending FGM.

RELIGIOUS LEADERS ENGAGEMENT

The Centre for Egyptian Women Legal Assistance (CEWLA) have been very active in engaging religious leaders to become change agents in Egypt. CEWLA have implemented a number of training programmes with imams and priests, which include discussion on what FGM is, its harmful effects, and the potential of religious leaders to reduce prevalence.

The Egyptian Doctors Syndicate released a statement declaring a commitment to ending FGM.
**COMMUNICATION ON FGM**

**T.V. Advertising**

Television is overwhelmingly the most popular medium for communications in Egypt — it is watched at an almost universal rate across the country by 15-59 year-olds with minimal variances across demographic groups like geography or wealth. In 2015, 80.6% of women and 90.3% of men who had received information about FGM received it via television, making it one of the most vital resources for the end FGM movement in the country. National Population Council has made the most of this resource through its National Media Campaign of 2015, ‘Enough FGM’ - a television advertising campaign.

Literacy is not universal in Egypt, with women making up the disproportionate amount of the illiterate population. As a result, TV and video are key to reaching these women. The NGOs Coalition Against FGM/C is highly active on social media and makes good use of videos as an inclusive way to share stories and engage with people from all backgrounds in Egypt.

Social media also plays a large role in social and political movements in Egypt — it played an instrumental role during the Arab Spring and continues to be a medium used most frequently by youth.

---

**EMERGING ISSUES & TRENDS**

**MEDICALISATION OF FGM**

The medicalisation of FGM is an emerging and increasing trend in Egypt. Medicalisation is defined by FGM being carried out by health personnel and or in a health facility. Of women in Egypt aged 15-49 who have undergone FGM, over 33% have had it performed by a doctor, nurse or other medical professional; compare this against girls aged 1-14 and the rate of medicalisation increases to 67% showing a marked trend towards the practice being performed by medical practitioners. Doctors Against FGM, a programme run by the National Population Council in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Population and UNFPA, reports that doctors often learn directly from ‘Dayas’, or traditional practitioners, who have no formal medical training.¹⁰

---

80.6% of women and 90.3% of men who had received information about FGM received it via television
The Egyptian government has attempted to stem the medicalisation of FGM in Egypt through the 1996 ban against performing FGM in a government hospital or clinic and the 2008 blanket ban on FGM. But loopholes still exist that allow the practice to continue. The 2008 law requires that medical professionals report any cases of FGM that they come across, however there is still no law specifying that performing FGM constitutes a medical malpractice. Medical professionals, especially those in rural areas, have economic pressures which encourage them to continue the practice – they depend on being accepted in communities to have new patients and therefore their livelihoods. If a doctor is not willing to perform FGM, families could move to a new doctor. For rural doctors, ending FGM means putting your livelihood at stake.

There are still loopholes in the law that allow the practice to continue. This is a gap that Doctors Against Cutting, INGOs and other groups are working to close through sensitisation trainings with medical professionals, as well as with community groups. Much of the work debunks the myth that FGM is safe if it is performed by a doctor. There is no medical procedure for FGM that a doctor can be trained in - the practice will always be improvised and therefore unsafe.

High levels of youth engagement in Egyptian politics presents an opportunity to end FGM. Young Egyptians are active participants in political processes and played a lead role in the Arab Spring movement. They are well connected via social media and meaningfully engage in international and regional dialogues. Their mobilization in the campaign to end FGM could reap rewards.

REFERENCES

4. UNDP http://www eg.undp.org/content/egypt/en/home/countryinfo.html
7. 28 Too Many Egypt Country Profile http://28toomany.org/media/uploads/egypt_country_profile_final__compressed.pdf
9. 28 Too Many Country Profile on Egypt
    - Front cover image: Mathilda Khoo via Unsplash
    - Back cover image: Simon Goetz via Unsplash
HOW TO GET INVOLVED

BECOME A MEMBER
www.thegirlgeneration.org

FOLLOW UPDATES
ON SOCIAL MEDIA

TheGirlGen
@TheGirlGen
thegirlgen

DEVELOPED NOVEMBER 2018
www.thegirlgeneration.org