

“Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): A Survey on Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practice among Households in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region”

OVERVIEW

This report is based on the first-ever KAP Study on FGM in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I). Also the first KAP Survey in the Middle East-North Africa region, it provides new and important perspective on FGM. Its purpose is to identify and characterize barriers to eradicating the practice of FGM in the KR-I, so as to inform the design of interventions that can effectively address these barriers. The findings are based on a survey of 827 households conducted in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah governorates, including Garmyan as a sub-district. Among the key findings:

FGM is widespread in KR-I – but has declined in recent years

- 58.5% of the 258 women responding reported being mutilated themselves, with 61% in Erbil and 55.8% in Sulaimaniyah
- 29.3% of women with daughters reported their daughters were mutilated
- 44.9% of all respondents reported at least one female family member was mutilated
- Five years old was the mean age at which daughters and other female relatives were reported to have been mutilated
- Mutilation rates increased roughly with age, suggesting the practice of FGM has declined over time

CONSEQUENCES OF FGM

Most people know FGM causes medical problems...

- More than 80% of all respondents knew mutilation causes reduced sexual desire (82.2%); reduced sexual satisfaction (80.6%); less or no sexual pleasure during intercourse
- Half (50.8%) knew mutilation causes psychological problems, including sadness and depression, anger, anxiety and fear, feelings of inferiority, shyness, signs of traumatization, low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence
- About one-quarter knew mutilation causes menstrual problems (27.2%), cysts (27.1%), and abscesses (22.7%)

... But many remain unaware of the medical risks

- 56.6% of all respondents didn't know if FGM causes labor difficulties
- 35.1% said they didn't know if mutilation causes health problems
- 36.8 per cent of men didn't know if mutilation harmed women

Many women have psychosocial problems from FGM

Of women reporting ongoing problems related to their mutilation:

- 64.3% reported relationship problems with their husband
- 26.8% psychological problems
- 25.0% problems with self-esteem
- 14.3% problems trusting other people



WHO SUPPORTS FGM?

Most people say they don't personally support FGM

- 72.3% reported they don't support FGM at all
- 13.8% don't support it much
- 13.0% support mutilation much or very much; 9.7% of women and 16.8% of men

Yet, families, traditional birth attendants and religious leaders are seen as the major supporters of mutilation in the community

Who are the main supporters of FGM in the community?

	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
Families	59.7%	48.9%
Birth attendants	26.5%	20.9%
Religious leaders	36.5%	19.8%

And, mothers are seen as the biggest mutilation supporters in the family

Mothers	75.0%
Fathers	24.4%
Grandmothers	16.6%
Mothers-in-law	9.4%

Mothers also mostly control the FGM decision ...

- 68.8% of respondents said that the mother was responsible for decision to mutilate her daughter
- 22.1% said it was a decision made by parents as a couple

... But most respondents believe both parents should be involved

- 63.4% of respondents said the mother and father together should decide about FGM
- 28.1% thought that the mother should make the decision

REASONS BEHIND FGM

Tradition and religion are seen as the biggest reasons for mutilation ...

Asked about their opinion on the general reasons FGM is practiced:

- 66.1% responded it is a tradition to be followed
- 46.0% think FGM is related to religious beliefs
- 13.4% it is due to community pressure
- 8.1% cited family pressure

... But most think it's bad tradition

- 67.5% disagreed that FGM should be maintained as a tradition
- 45.5% strongly disagreed

Education is also a factor. Mutilation is more likely if parents can't read

- Of those who had circumcised daughters, 57.0% could not read at all, and another 18.5% could read only with difficulty

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH INFORMATION

Mothers are the main source of information about reproductive and sexual health issues ...

- 57.6% of women reported they learned about reproductive and sexual health issues from their mothers.

Clinics are the preferred source of reproductive health services ...

Asked where reproductive help and advice is acquired:

- 61.6% of respondents named clinics
- 43.4% named government clinics
- 5.0% named traditional birth attendants

Asked about frequency of accessing reproductive health care:

- 43.3% reported twice a year
- 17.2% once a year
- 6.8% never

... But family is still the primary source of FGM information

Asked their primary source of information about FGM:

- 58.2% responded family
- 21.6% television, radio, and newspapers
- 18.1% friends
- 13.5% neighbors
- 5.8% religious leaders
- 1.9% non-governmental organizations

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Most think FGM should be eradicated

- 68.1% thought FGM should not be practiced, even under medically controlled conditions
- 67.5% thought FGM should be eradicated
- 71.9% agreed FGM should be prevented
- 66.1% stated that women should be protected from FGM
- 68.3% said they would prefer their daughter not be circumcised

More than half know of the law against FGM...and nearly 75% believe it can help reduce FGM

- 57.5% of all respondents heard about *Act No. 8: The Law Against Domestic Violence in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, which includes an article making FGM illegal in the IRK
- 74.4% believed that a law could help to reduce the practice of FGM

The vast majority favor education on FGM for their daughters

90.4% of all respondents would welcome the education of their daughters about FGM and its harms.

Asked who is the right group to share information:

- 45.2% named religious leaders
- 40.6% health professionals
- 33% social workers
- 21.4% NGOs
- 6.1% traditional birth attendants



More men (50.0%) preferred religious leaders versus women (40.0%), while more women (43.5%) than men (37.6%) preferred health professionals for providing FGM education and information.

... And FGM awareness campaigns appear to be working, especially on TV

- 64.2% of respondent had heard of a FGM awareness campaign. Of these:
- 85.6% became aware of FGM campaigns through television (TV)
- 16.2% through newspapers
- 13.3% through radio
- 11.4% through civil society NGOs

TV is the preferred source of FGM information

- 52.5% chose TV as their preferred choice
- 28.5% health professionals
- 23.4% family and relatives