

CONFIRMING THE EXTENT OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is an embedded cultural practice in Egypt, where 93 percent of women in this study were found to have some form of FGM. Study findings suggest that increased efforts to inform women and their families of the problems associated with FGM, especially cases of severe health complications or mortality, are needed to help discourage the practice.

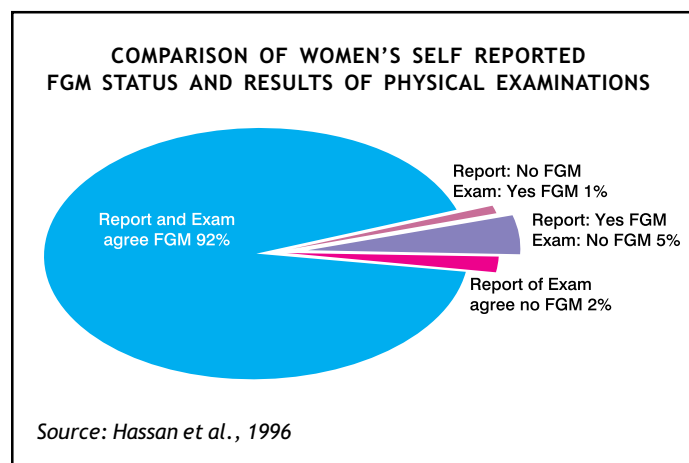
BACKGROUND

The 1995 Egyptian Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS) was the first nationally representative survey to measure female genital mutilation (FGM), which is performed mainly on pre-adolescent girls and involves the partial or total excision of external parts of the genital tract (labia minora, labia majora and clitoris). The study data indicated an FGM prevalence of 97 percent among Egyptian women of reproductive age. FGM is considered to mark a girl's passage to womanhood or her preparation for marriage. Negative health implications of the practice include death from hemorrhage, infection or tetanus; infertility; incontinence; and complications during pregnancy and childbirth. The Egyptian Fertility Care Society (EFCS), with support from Macro International and the Population Council's ANE OR/TA Project, carried out a clinic-based study to investigate the types of FGM practices in Egypt as well as the accuracy of the EDHS self-reporting. A total of 1,339 women selected at the out-patient services of 11 clinics providing gynecological or family planning services participated in the study. The women were interviewed using the FGM module from the 1995 EDHS. A specially-trained OB/GYN physician then conducted a physical examination to collect data on the prevalence and type of FGM.

FINDINGS

■ Self-reporting of FGM and the examination findings concurred in approximately 94 percent of cases. In all, 93 percent of the women were found to have some type of FGM.

■ Approximately 60 percent of the women examined were found to have partial or total removal of both the clitoris and labia minora; 17 percent had their clitoris removed; 7 percent had the labia minora excised; 9 percent had the tissue of the labia majora excised; and 7 percent showed no evidence of FGM.



- The women included in the study are predominantly from lower socio-economic segments of Egyptian society as women from higher classes are less likely to utilize public health services for their health care.
- Sixty-six percent of the women interviewed are below age 35, 95 percent are Muslim, all have been married, 64 percent were married below age 20, 35 percent have four or more children, 44 percent have no formal education, and 55 percent live in rural areas.
- The likelihood for a woman to have some type of FGM decreases if her husband or either of her parents, particularly her mother, have a higher education.
- Partial or total excision of only the clitoris was more prevalent among women between 15 and 24 years of age.
- Eighty percent of all women in this study think that FGM should continue. Meanwhile, 94 percent of women with FGM intend to do the operation on their daughters as opposed to 64 percent with no FGM. Almost 40 percent of women with daughters cited custom as the main reason for this practice.
- Among women who do not intend to practice FGM on a daughter, 59 percent said the practice was unacceptable and 40 percent feared complications.
- Fourteen percent of women stated that FGM should be stopped. Of those, 43 percent view it as a bad custom, 42 percent fear the risk of complications, and 22 percent confirmed it prevents satisfaction with marital relations. Almost 80 percent of them emphasized educating parents on the hazards of the operation and 25 percent suggested banning the operation as a possible means of abolishing the practice.
- Sixty-five percent of mothers had the procedure performed by a traditional midwife, as opposed to only 31 percent of daughters. A physician performed the operation on 10 percent of mothers and 37 percent of daughters.

UTILIZATION OF RESULTS

- The study's findings have been incorporated in the final report of the 1995 Egyptian Demographic and Health Survey.
- The findings are contributing to the scientific understanding of the practice of female genital mutilation in Egypt.
- The national NGO task force on FGM is using the findings to develop a media advocacy plan and develop key public messages. This plan aims at suggesting and implementing tools that strengthen political support, educate media professionals about FGM hazards, and create a network of media professionals interested in covering the issue. The task force is also developing future research priorities.

Hassan, E.O., N.El Nahal, M. El Husseinie, F. Gamil, F. El Zanaty, A. Way, D. Huntington and L. Nawar. Clinic-based Investigation of the Typology and Self-reporting of FGM in Egypt, Final Report. 1996. Cairo: Egyptian Fertility Care Society, the Population Council, and Macro International. November.

For further information on this study or to obtain a copy of the final report, please contact the Egyptian Fertility Care Society (EFCS), 2A Mahrouki St., Monadesen, Cairo, Egypt. Tel 20-2-347-0674, Fax: 20-2-346-8782. Or the Population Council, 6A Giza Street, P.O. Box 115, Dokki, 12211 Egypt. Tel: 20-2-573-8277/570-1733, Fax: 20-2-570-1804.

This project was conducted with support from the Population Council's Asia and Near East Operations Research and Technical Assistance Project. The ANE OR/TA Project is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, Office of Population, under Contract No. DPE-C-00-90-0002-10, Project No. 936-3030, Strategies for Improving Family Planning and Reproductive Health Service Delivery. Funding was also provided through Macro International's Demographic and Health Survey.