female genital mutilation

**Definition:**

female genital mutilation from *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate(R) Dictionary* (1979): a procedure performed esp. as a cultural rite that typically includes the total or partial excision of the female external genitalia and esp. the clitoris and labia minora and that is now outlawed in many nations including the U.S. — abbr. *FGM* — called also female circumcision compare infibulation

**Summary Article:**

female genital mutilation from *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

The partial or total removal of female external genitalia for cultural, religious, or other non-medical reasons. There are three types: Sunna, which involves cutting off the hood, and sometimes the tip, of the clitoris; clitoridectomy, the excision of the clitoris and removal of parts of the inner and outer labia; infibulation (most widely practised in Sudan and Somalia), the removal of the clitoris, the inner and outer labia, and the stitching of the scraped sides of the vulva across the vagina leaving a small hole to allow passage of urine and menstrual blood.

The procedure has often been compared to male circumcision. It is far more drastic, however. Most operations are performed under unhygienic conditions, without antiseptics or anaesthetics, and by non-medically trained personnel. Side effects can include haemorrhage, shock, painful scars, septicaemia, chronic urinary infection, clitoral cysts, transmission of the HIV virus, and death. Infibulation can lead to problems in later life, especially during menstruation, sexual intercourse, and childbirth.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is practised across Muslim Africa between Senegal and Somalia, as well as in the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen, and among Muslims in Malaysia and Indonesia. In 1995 an Egyptian government report estimated that 97% of married or formerly married women in Egypt have been circumcised. In countries where FGM is common, it is also performed by Christians, Jews, and by various indigenous groups. Uncircumcised women in these countries are considered ‘unclean’ and often have difficulty finding marriage partners. Muslim immigrants also occasionally perform it in the USA and the UK. In 1997 there were over 114 million women and girls worldwide who had undergone FGM.

Supporters of FGM see it as a religious duty, social custom to protect a woman's virginity and therefore her honour, or as a necessary operation for health reasons. Opponents see it as a cruel mutilation of young women in order to reduce their sexual desire, making them less likely to engage in premarital intercourse or seek extramarital affairs.

The procedure is illegal in Kenya, Senegal, Canada, France, Sweden, and Switzerland. In the UK it is prohibited under the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act (1985), and in the USA under the Federal Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act passed in September 1996. The United Nations, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization consider FGM to be a violation of human rights and have recommended its eradication.

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