

Study

Female Genital Mutilation in Central and Southern Iraq



Produced by

Civil Society Activists and Medical Researchers
from the South-Central Area of Iraq

Qadisiyah Governorate

Iraq 2014

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Supported by WADI
and the
Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues, US Department of State



Objective

The aim of this field survey was to determine the extent of the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) in parts of Central and Southern Iraq. The world needs to know if FGM is existent in these areas, especially since there is almost complete denial of the practice.

This survey was conducted by selecting a sample of a thousand women from the provinces of Qadisiyah and Wasit; five hundred women from each province. The selection was made up of random samples from various areas, including urban and rural parts.

Female volunteers, nurses and civil society activists, designed the questionnaire and conducted the interviews. They also conducted the interviews and meetings with medical and nursing staff.

This study was realized in cooperation with the following organizations:

Center for Women's Human Rights / Diwaniyah Governorate

Democratic Women's Organization for Women's Rights / Wasit Governorate

WADI / Sulaimaniyah Governorate

Monitoring sites:

1 - Diwaniyah Governorate:

Al Diwaniya Teaching Hospital for Women and Children

Departments of Obstetrics and Gynecology in public hospitals in the districts of Shamiya, Hamzah and Afak.

External health centers: Division of parent and child health care.

2 - Wasit Governorate:

City of Kut, district Al-Numaniya, district Al-Hay, subdistrict Al-Muwafaqiya, subdistrict Al-Basha'ir

Field monitoring period:

Thirty-day period (January 16 to February 15, 2014).

Introduction

The existence and prevalence of female genital mutilation in the Kurdistan region of Iraq was proved and acknowledged through statistical surveys. Before, it was denied and surrounded by complete silence. The results documented the need for legal action in Iraqi Kurdistan and laid ground for a legal framework designed to curb the practice and criminalize it .

Although FGM is well-known and widespread in central and southern Iraq since more than two decades, the practice has always been ignored and completely denied.

While we witnessed some positive developments in terms of social and legal measures to reduce female genital mutilation in Iraqi Kurdistan, suspicions rose concerning the existence of this phenomenon in all provinces of Iraq. However, when the topic is addressed in public it is still denied, distorted and censored.

Perhaps this study will break the silence. It is the first of its kind on this subject. More detailed and comprehensive investigations need to follow.

What is female genital mutilation ?

Definition of female genital mutilation as stated in the WHO publications : Female genital mutilation (FGM) includes procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

Most of the practicing people are not well informed about the implications of FGM, they are unfamiliar with the medical details and the social and legal aspects .

It was common belief that FGM is widespread in Africa and some countries in Southeast Asia, but only recently its prevalence in the Middle East (and internationally due to immigration) became an issue.

As a result of the liberation movements and the spread of cultural awareness and participation of women in the economic development process which gave them some degree of economic independence, women began to demand their legitimate rights according to international human rights and national constitutions and laws, including the right to determine their own bodies .

The Iraqi-German human rights organization WADI and its branches launched an international campaign to fight female genital mutilation in the Middle East and Asia. Before, they had conducted studies and collected data that documented the prevalence of FGM, and proved that it is not just an African tradition.

These publications have led the WHO to publish background information about the regional historical roots of this phenomenon, and they encouraged non-governmental organizations concerned with human rights to adopt programs to reduce and combat the practice.

The adoption of the worldwide ban of FGM issued by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 20, 2012 became possible after studies and data had proved that FGM is prevalent in all countries and not a social tradition restricted to the African continent only .

The 6th of February was declared the awareness day on FGM under the name “International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation”.

As stated in the final recommendations (25/e) of the regular CEDAW report (4-6) on Iraq in 2014 , actions and measures to prevent these harmful practices are required.

The Questionnaire

1. Governorate:	Address:				Town	Village
2. Age	1-10	11-18	19-35	36-45	45+	
3. Marital status	Minor	Married	Single	Widow		
4. Age of circumcision	Before 10	11-18	19-35	36-45	45+	
5. The procedure was performed by	Doctor	Nurse / Registered Midwife		Experienced woman		
6. Is the woman contented with her circumcision?	Contented	Not contented	Rejecting	Don't know		
7. Is the husband contented with the circumcision?	Contented	Not contented	Rejecting	Don't know		
8. Who decided to perform the procedure?	Parents	Husband	Husband's family	I myself	Other	
9. Do you support the continuation of the practice?	Yes	No	I don't care			
10. What is the reason for this practice?	Religious belief	Inherited customs and traditions			Other	
11. Implications of this practice on women	Physical	Psychological	Social	Other		
12. Notes						

Main results of the survey

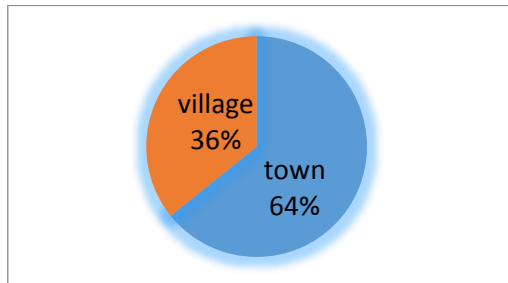
This FGM research was conducted in the Central/Southern Iraqi governorates of Qadisiya and Wasit. In each of the governorates 500 women and girls were questioned using the questionnaire documented above.

Of the 1,000 women and girls questioned, 257 said they had been subjected to FGM.

==> **FGM rate found: 25.7%**

Geographical distribution of the FGM-affected women

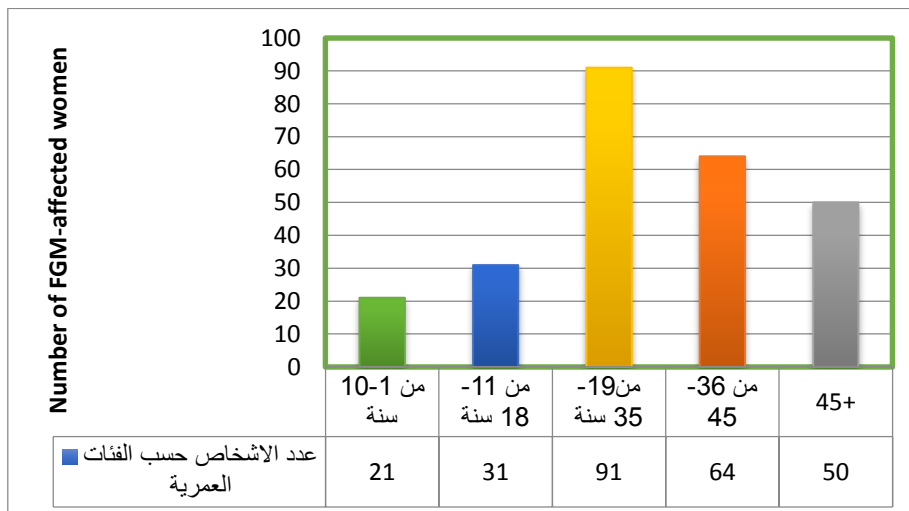
Town: 165 Village: 92



FGM-affected women by age group

1-10	11-18	19-35	36-45	45+
21	31	91	64	50

The results suggest that FGM seems to be more common among women aged between 19 and 45.

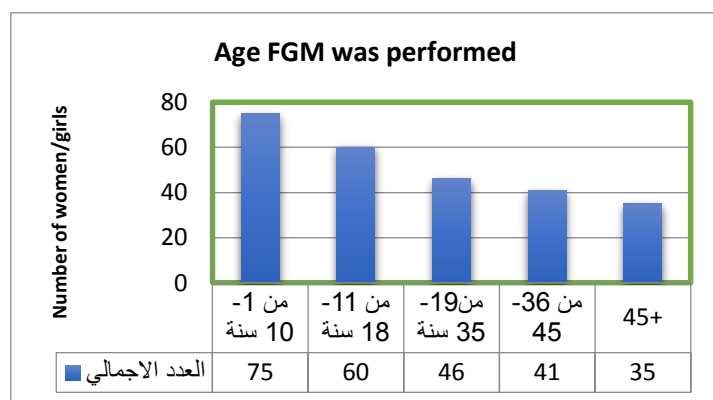


FGM-affected women by marital status

Minor	Married	Single	Widow
77	83	38	59

Age at which FGM was performed

Before 10	11-18	19-35	36-45	45+
75	60	46	41	35

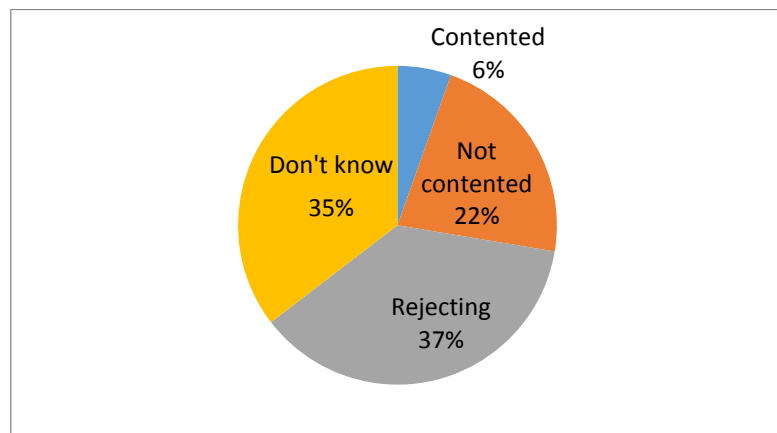


Perpetrators of FGM

Doctor	Nurse / Registered Midwife	Experienced woman
68	120	69

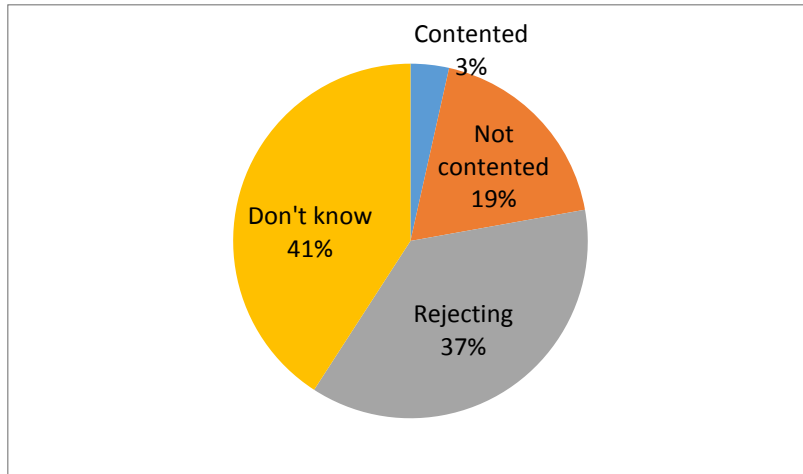
Consent of the woman on her circumcision

Contented	Not contented	Rejecting	Don't know
14	57	95	91



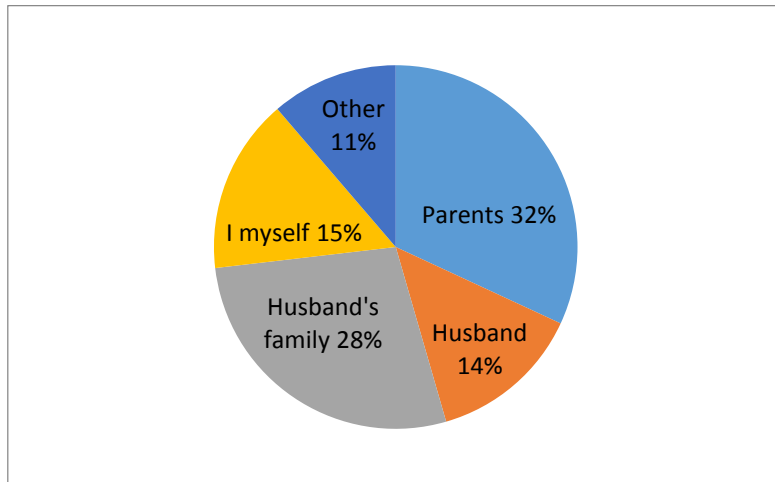
Consent of the husband on his wife's circumcision

Contented	Not contented	Rejecting	Don't know
9	48	95	105



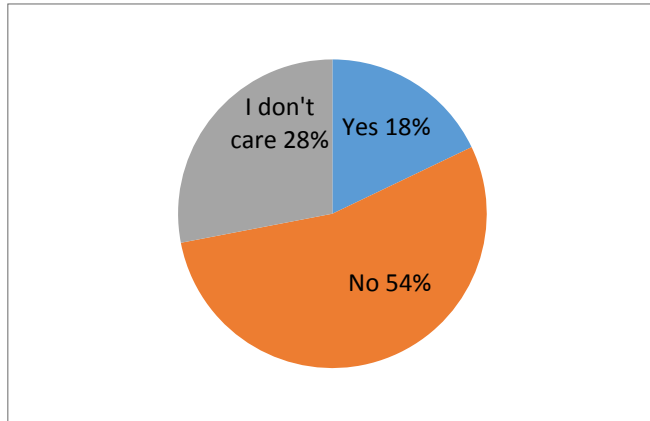
Who decided to perform FGM?

Parents	Husband	Husband's family	I myself	Other
82	35	71	40	29



The extent of support for the practice

Yes	No	I don't care
46	139	72



The assumed reason for the practice

Religious belief	Inherited customs and traditions	Other
99	121	37

Assumed implications of FGM on women

Physical	Psychological	Social	Other
151	162	121	

Discussion and Conclusions

This FGM survey which was conducted in parts of central and southern Iraq point to the fact that the practice is less prevalent nowadays than it used to be two decades ago (however, there are no studies or statistics available from that time). FGM seems to have become less in recent years, although the issue is completely tabooed and denied.

The religious diversity caused through migration and displacements belongs to the most important factors contributing to the continued practice of FGM.

It is not possible to determine the true extent of FGM because of the development of science and advanced medical examination methods applied in the health centers which are either run by government institutions or private clinics. The examination is done by using laboratory tests. They render dispensable visual examinations which used to be common in the past. Furthermore, most women nowadays prefer a Caesarean section birth, which makes it more difficult to determine the true proportion of women who are victims of female genital mutilation.

Many of the doctors and health care providers questioned mentioned that FGM is preferably conducted in the warm days during the summer, rather than in winter, without knowing the reason for it.

One of the doctors for gynecology and obstetrics related that the survival and continuation of the practice among older women is connected to an undisclosed *fatwa* demanding genital mutilation for women who are going to perform Hajj or Umrah.

Currently many are addressing the subject of female genital mutilation in literature and discussions at conferences and seminars in different areas of Iraq, not only in the Kurdistan region. After ignorance and an almost complete denial, the existence of this practice is now recognized for the first time.

Recommendations

- Encourage surveys, studies, and continue to collect data on the prevalence of female genital mutilation in our communities
- Activate the role of civil society organizations to adopt effective mechanisms to reduce this practice
- Encourage the participation of religious and community leaders to adopt an active role in reducing this practice
- Adopt health and educational programs to educate the community about the implications of FGM.
- Advance the practical application of the national plan for the advancement of women, especially in the field of education and health
- Enact laws to combat violence against women
- Encourage female victims of such practices to discuss their cases openly without fear or hesitation.
- Networking, communication and exchange of experiences through field visits
- Issue publications, brochures and periodic reports

Sources and links

CEDAW/C/IRQ/CO/4-6 - 28 February 2014

Magazine NUN Issue 41 (March 2014), pp. 10 / News reports: UNICEF: despite the overwhelming opposition to female genital mutilation, the practice continues to threaten millions of girls

UN resolution to ban female genital mutilation in 20/12/2012

Newsletter of the Regional Office of the World Health Organization on female genital mutilation.

Publications and reports of WADI in Iraqi Kurdistan

Legislation criminalizing FGM in Kurdistan - Law No. (8) of the year 2011

Personal meetings