

## ***“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