

# The impact of Female Genital Mutilation in African Countries

*Cierra Evans | April 8th, 2025*

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According to UNWOMEN, female genital mutilation refers to "all procedures involving the partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or other injury to female genital organs for non-medical reasons." Female genital mutilation (FGM) occurs the most in African countries, with 98% of the occurrences taking place in Somalia and 90% in Sierra Leone.

It's estimated by UNWOMEN that 230 million women have undergone FGM, and that the number has risen by 15% (30 million people) over the past 8 years (UNWOMEN, 2025).

FGM is performed on minors and girls living in poverty more than anyone by "traditional practitioners."

A powerful quote from UNWOMEN: "Female genital mutilation also infringes upon fundamental human rights of girls and women, including their right to health, security, dignity, bodily autonomy and – in cases where the procedure leads to death – the right to life."

The reasons for FGM are rooted in societal and cultural beliefs over true medical reasonings. In fact, there's absolutely no benefit to this procedure, and it does more harm than good. UNWOMEN explains that in some countries, the procedure is a rite of passage into womanhood, and for others? It's a way to ensure these girls will not be sexually active so that families can have stronger inheritances when marrying.

Some individuals even use religious texts to justify the procedure, but it's important to recognize these texts are being intentionally misinterpreted.

## What does this have to do with women's rights globally?

Absolutely everything.

Even though female genital mutilation is not a practice that occurs in the United States, it's something many of us could empathize with due to the current shifts in our rights to our bodily autonomy since 2022, with things like the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and abortion only being protected in under 10 state constitutions.

It highlights that from country to country, different things are being done to control a woman. In Africa, this is a harmful procedure being forced to control women's sexual liberation, and for us?

It's a beneficial procedure being taken away to punish us for that same liberation we should have a right to.

And despite this being a procedure that happens outside of our country, we're working to stop it.

UNWOMEN.org reports, "The United Nations has played a pivotal role in global efforts to end female genital mutilation using resolutions that have consistently called for the end of all harmful practices against women and girls, including female genital mutilation." (UNWOMEN)

They've made progress as well! "In 2024, the European Parliament adopted a new directive forcing all European Union countries to criminalize female genital mutilation, increase awareness of the practice, and provide support to survivors." (UNWOMEN)

## **Why Raising Awareness Is Important for FGM**

Raising awareness is pivotal for this matter. Many of the victims of this procedure don't have the platform or even support of their community to express their discomfort with FGM, so it's important we advocate for them.

Other countries working to spread awareness and share the harmful results of this procedure can open the eyes of people who practice it and make them see just how cruel this truly is.

The more we speak, the more we shame, and the more we call for action results in one less young woman losing her rights (and, in many cases, her life).

## References

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