

# KNOW AND ACT

## Prevention of female circumcision

Female circumcision is a cultural tradition that has been going on for thousands of years and is still practised in Africa, Middle East and Asia. The issue has also become topical in Finland as a result of international immigration.

### Why are women and girls circumcised?

Multiple reasons underlie the tradition of female circumcision, and these vary from one country, region and culture to the other.

The tradition is often linked to religion, although no religious doctrine demands circumcising girls or women.

In addition to religion, people justify the tradition with cultural, moral, social and economic factors. Beliefs related to sexuality, purity and aesthetics also keep up the tradition.

### Health effects

Female circumcision is an irreversible procedure which causes numerous health problems and risks. The repercussions vary based on the circumciser, extent of the procedure and the prevailing conditions.

#### Immediate health effects

- pain, bleeding, infections, difficulties to urinate and psychological issues

#### Long-term health problems

- painful menstrual cramps, pain during intercourse, further complications caused by scarring, problems with urination and psychological issues

#### Complications of childbirth

- fear of childbirth, difficulty to monitor the progress of labour and the condition of the foetus, unnecessary Caesarean sections and psychological issues

### Did you know that...

- female circumcision is an ancient cultural tradition
- female circumcision continues to be practised today around Africa, the Middle East and Asia
- the issue of the tradition of female circumcision is also topical in Finland
- female circumcision causes multiple health problems and risks
- female circumcision is prohibited in Finland; taking a girl living in Finland to be circumcised in a foreign country is also illegal
- Finland has its own action plan for the prevention of female circumcision
- bringing up the topic is the best preventive work for bringing an end to the tradition of circumcision



### Definition by the WHO

*Female genital mutilation (FGM) comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.*

-World Health Organization (WHO)

The concept of female genital mutilation (FGM) is also used to refer to female circumcision.

### Female circumcision is prohibited in Finland

Female genital mutilation (FGM), or the circumcision of women and girls, is one form of violence against women. According to the Penal Code, female circumcision is a punishable act in Finland. Taking a girl living in Finland to be circumcised in a foreign country is also illegal. The Child Welfare Act obligates the authorities to take action if a girl is in danger of being circumcised.



## Bring up the issue – key to preventive work

Female circumcision is a sensitive topic. Bringing up the issue might seem difficult. Using a moderate and culturally sensitive approach is significant for the success of preventive work. It is important to include the discussions on the matter to patient records in order to secure continuity.

According to the action plan by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, professionals working in social and health care, day-care centres, child protective services, teaching and education services, youth work and refugee shelters must be equipped to, when needed, bring up the issue of female circumcision with the families with immigrant background whose country of origin continues to practise the tradition.

A girl can be circumcised in infancy, at preschool age, at school age or as a teenager, during the first pregnancy or only after delivery. The most common age for circumcision is 4–10 years.

## Questions that can be used in bringing up the issue of circumcision

- How does your culture perceive female circumcision?
- What do your family/relatives think about this tradition?
- What are you planning to do with your daughter?
- Did you know that female circumcision causes various health problems?
- Are you aware that female circumcision is illegal in Finland?

## Supporting girls and women who have been circumcised

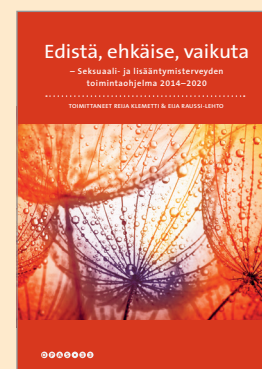
The types of female circumcision vary according to the country and culture of origin. The most common procedures are related to partial or total removal of the clitoris and/or the labia minora.

The so-called *pharaonic circumcision* is the most extensive procedure which involves sewing together the partially removed labia, leaving only a narrow hole for the passage of urine and menstrual fluid.

It is important to remain sensitive and respectful to the client in examining and treating her. The care provided for circumcised girls and women aims at improving their health and quality of life.

- Ask about the girl's/woman's possible health problems related to circumcision
- Offer opening surgery to all girls and women who have been circumcised with the pharaonic method
- Find out about the need for psychological support of the circumcised girl/woman
- Record the information – including your discussions with the client

## Further information



### Promote, prevent, influence – action programme for the promotion of sexual and reproductive health 2014–2020.

Reija Klemetti, Eija Raussi-Lehto (ed.). National Institute for Health and Welfare. Guide 33/2014 Priority areas: children and adolescents, supporting the resources of parturients, multiculturalism and men's sexual and reproductive health.

[www.thl.fi/fgm](http://www.thl.fi/fgm)  
**Action plan for the prevention of circumcision of girls and women 2012–2016 (FGM).** Helsinki: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Publications 8/2012. The National Institute for Health and Welfare coordinates the implementation of the programme.

[www.stm.fi/publications](http://www.stm.fi/publications)

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