



PRESS RELEASE

February 2015 - Hargeisa, Somaliland



ASSESSMENT OF THE PREVALENCE, PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDE OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/CUTTING. *WHERE ARE WE NOW?*

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for nontherapeutic/medical reasons. It is an ancient tradition in large parts of Africa and is now practised in 30 countries in western, eastern, and north-eastern Africa, parts of the Middle East and Asia, and within some immigrant communities in Europe, North America and Australia. It contributes to several impacts throughout females life including social, psychological and health.

The government of Somaliland drafted a policy in 2011 for eradication of FGM/C. Likewise, NAFIS in partnership with other member organizations have been implementing strategic interventions directed towards FGM/C abandonment in the country but no studies had been conducted in the whole of Somaliland to ascertain the FGM/C prevalence.

This study which was conducted by NAFIS Network and funded by UNDP and KNH looked at the prevalence, perception and attitude towards abandonment of FGM/C in Somaliland. Descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted between March to June 2014 and quantitative data was collected through questionnaire from 1,986 females of reproductive age (15-49) from 19 MCHs from all the six regions of Somaliland to ascertain the prevalence of FGM/C. Data triangulation was done by collecting qualitative information through interview schedules using focus group discussions (FGDs) from women, men, females & male youths and traditional circumcisers while key informant interviews were conducted with religious leaders, MoLSA, MoRA, MoH, MoE (gender department), SLNMA, SMA and Somaliland parliament (Health

Caucus). Secondary data was collected through desk reviews of the previous reports from other institutions that have implemented FGM/C interventions.

On prevalence: The study found out that, out of 1,986 women interviewed, the prevalence rate of FGM/C was 99.8%. 4 (0.2%) of the women from urban areas were not cut. The study shows that rural/pastoral circumcision stands at 100%. The average FGM/C performance age is eight years. Pharaonic type is performed at 82.3% in rural areas while 80.7% in urban areas. Sunna circumcision is not clearly understood by the respondents. In rural areas, 99.5% of cutting is done by the traditional circumcisers while at 95.7% in urban areas. In this study, 2/3 of the women support Sunna to be performed in the health facilities for their daughters. The study further established that the mothers are the ones who lead the decision for cutting their daughters, at 75% in the rural and 68% in the urban. Both parents decision is 19% in the rural and 14% in the urban. In both set ups fathers only make decision at 2%.

On perception: 90.5% of people interviewed think it is impossible to leave the practice of FGM/C, and they were shocked by the idea of untouched women. But compared to the above mentioned figure of 99.8% of women having undergone FGM/C, there is an improvement. 90.5% of the women interviewed at MCHCs want their daughters to be cut while 9.3% have decided to abandon FGM/C. Some of the religious leaders interviewed admitted their daughters were not cut which indicates a positive acceptance and change in the interventions towards FGM/C abandonment with 90% of mothers also accepting Sunna type of FGM/C from the pharaonic type.

Majority of the youths wants FGM/C eradicated. Most respondents acknowledge eradication will take slow pace with the younger generation and the religious leaders promising to garner support and be effective role models of change. The majority of the respondents (66%) said FGM/C is done for cultural fulfilment. The religious leaders interviewed recognized pharaonic type of FGM/C to have no religious basis. They are committed to campaign for eradication through religious platforms in the mosques.

The study established that there had been a lot of awareness created through involved organizations, the community was well informed about FGM/C and its impacts to the females and



they requested for more concerted efforts of interventions by the stakeholders.

The respondents have positive attitudes towards FGM/C eradication and they feel this can possibly work if the circumcisers are fully involved in an anti FGM/C programs, the anti FGM/C policy is passed and enforcement is done by the legislators and there is full support from the religious, government and other community leaders.

The study concludes that non-governmental organizations, with the support from the Somaliland government and the donor funders have implemented recommendable recognized interventions for the last 9 years towards eradication of FGM/C in Somaliland with 9.3% opting for eradication and majority of the population opting for Sunna cutting. However, the study recognizes that issues of culture and religion take slow pace to tackle and more efforts are still required.

Therefore, the study recommends for the passing of the anti FGM/C policy, full support from the government, religious and community leaders as role models of zero tolerance for FGM/C, integration of FGM/C programs in all the educational curriculums within the country especially in universities and secondary levels and requests all the institutions, local, governmental, NGOs and any other stakeholders involved in community interventions to join hands to lobby and advocate for eradication of FGM/C in Somaliland in order to uphold women's right to health/ wellbeing and prevent them from complications caused by FGM/C.

