

Information brochure
for combating
female genital mutilation



Baden-Württemberg

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND INTEGRATION

*“A support group gave me the courage to get treatment.
Without their support, I would never have taken that step.
I’m very happy that after the reconstruction I am now a whole woman.
And I’m very thankful that this kind of help exists. I want to encourage
every woman to take this step and to get treatment.”*


Ms. M. from Somalia

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1. Greeting Words



 No woman and no girl should ever fall victim to genital mutilation. Women affected by this procedure suffer a lifetime from the physical and psychological harm. Very often, families are not aware of the consequences of this so-called tradition.

There are more than 130 million women and girls worldwide who have been victims of genital mutilation. It is estimated that every year, two million women and girls are added to that number. Due to the arrival of many immigrants from African countries, the number is increasing in Germany and Baden-Württemberg. We should therefore pay attention to female genital mutilation here in Germany and fight against this act of violence against women and girls. With this brochure, we want to raise awareness and inform women, girls and their families about the background, consequences and motives of


female genital mutilation. At the end of this brochure, we provide contact addresses where women and girls who have been victim of FGM or are at risk can find help.

We would like to give special thanks to (I)NTACT e.V., TERRE DES FEMMES, the Landesärztekammer (medical association), the Landeskriminalamt (criminal investigation department) and the Landesgesundheitsamt (health authority) for their cooperation, their expertise and support with the publication of this brochure.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Bärbl Mielich'.

Bärbl Mielich MdL (Member of the Landtag)
State secretary
Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration
Baden-Württemberg

2. Preface

 In Germany, women and girls are free to live their own life. Everybody has equal opportunities and can design his/her own life. And there's also the possibility to talk about problems and to get help if it is necessary.

Everybody in Germany should have a good life – regardless of his or her religion, culture or race. That means that customs and traditions from other countries and cultures are mutually respected. But sometimes it becomes necessary to question customs that may have a very long tradition, in order to protect women and girls.

With this brochure, we want to inform about such a traditional custom. There are procedures that hurt women and girls physically and psychologically – without any medical reason, just because it has always been done like this. Many girls and women have no memories

of that intervention to their body, because it is often done at a very young age, but they suffer the rest of their life from the consequences. That is why many women and girls often don't know where their physical pains and emotional problems come from.

Do some of the contents in this brochure sound familiar? Are you yourself or maybe somebody in your family affected? At the end of this brochure, you'll find important contact addresses where you can get help on a confidential basis.

3. Basic Information

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 2016)

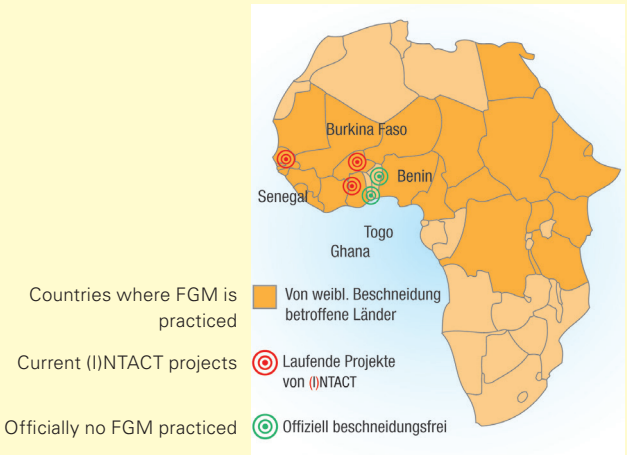
Prevalence

Female genital mutilation is widespread and is practiced almost worldwide. Procedures are carried out in 29 countries in Africa, in some Arab countries and in some countries in Southeast Asia. The practice is also common among women and girls in Europe, North and South America, Australia and New Zealand who have emigrated from those areas.

Girls and women who were born in Germany can also become victims of genital mutilation. Their families ask emigrated circumcisers and have the intervention carried out in secret or they send their

daughters to their home country during school holidays to have the practice carried out there.

Procedures are carried out on girls and women of all ages, sometimes as early as a few days after birth, or during adolescence or just before marriage. Female genital mutilation is mostly carried out on girls between age 4 and 14.



Types

Female genital mutilation is classified into 4 major types:

SUNNA:

The partial or total removal of the clitoris (clitoridectomy).

EXCISION:

The partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora (the inner folds of the vulva).

INFIBULATION:

Removal of the clitoris, the inner folds of the vulva (labia minora), and also the labia majora. The cut areas are stitched together and only a small opening is left for urine and menstrual blood.

OTHER:

Other harmful procedures to the female genitalia, e.g. pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing the genital area.

Consequences

The consequences depend on the type of the procedure. There can be immediate complications and/or long-term and chronic consequences.

IMMEDIATE COMPLICATIONS:

Severe pain, excessive bleeding (hemorrhage), infections, injury to arteries, urethra or bladder.

LONG-TERM AND/OR CHRONIC CONSEQUENCES:

Urinary tract infection, painful menstruation, incontinence, complications during pregnancy and increased risk of childbirth complications.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES:

Behaviour difficulties, traumatic disorders, poor performance in school, or pain during intercourse which can lead to separation and divorce.

The World Health Organization assumes that one in ten girls does not survive a genital mutilation and that a quarter of all victims dies of the long-term consequences.

Backgrounds

There are different reasons as to why genital mutilations are still performed on girls and women. The reasons vary from one ethnic group to another and are often based on age-old traditions.

IS THIS INTERVENTION REQUIRED BY RELIGIONS?

NO, neither Christianity nor the Islam demand this procedure. This tradition is older than any religion.

IS FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION COMPARABLE TO CIRCUMCISION IN BOYS?

NO, these two procedures are not comparable. The excision in girls is equal to the cutting off of a boy's penis.

DOES THIS PROCEDURE ENSURE VIRGINITY BEFORE MARRIAGE AND FIDELITY AFTERWARD?

NO, because everybody has to control his or her own behaviour that was shaped during childhood and influenced by our parents.

This intervention does not guarantee responsible sexual behaviour or happy marriages.

DOES THIS INTERVENTION ENHANCE FERTILITY?

NO, it does not enhance fertility. Possible consequences of this intervention are genital infections which can lead to sterility. Further consequences can be severe complications during childbirth.

4. Legal situation

Female genital mutilation is illegal in Germany. According to German law, this intervention is not only bodily harm, but a criminal offence which is punished with at least one year in prison (§ 226a German criminal code StGB). That means that female genital mutilation is a crime! If the woman or the girl is resident in Germany, the procedure is even punishable when it is carried out abroad (see § 5 StGB criminal code). Furthermore, if the girl is resident in Germany, genital mutilation constitutes a harm to the welfare of the child whether it was carried out in Germany or in another country.

The intervention can therefore lead to withdrawal of parents' custody (see § 8a SGB German criminal code VIII; § 1666 and §1631 BGB German civil code).

Beyond that, genital mutilation violates important international conventions for the protection of human rights, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations in 1948.

5. Where to get help

There are different institutions that can help women and girls and also their families. Outreach clinics (“Beratungsstellen”), but also doctors or the nationwide help hotline provide information and offer assistance.

Medical secrecy

Women and girls who have been victims of FGM or are at risk can ask a doctor whom they trust when they need help and information. In Germany, every doctor is obliged to keep discussions with a patient secret (see § 203 StGB German Criminal Code).

Contact addresses

Universitätsklinikum Freiburg
Klinik für Frauenheilkunde
(University gynecological hospital)
PD Dr. med. Michaela Bossart
Hugstetter Str. 55
79106 Freiburg
Tel. 0761 270-31680 / -30250

Frauenklinik Stuttgart
Gynäkologische Ambulanz
(Gynecological hospital, outpatient department)
Kriegsbergstraße 62
70174 Stuttgart
Tel. 0711 278-62720

PD Dr. Stefanie Bussen
Praxis für Frauenheilkunde und Geburtshilfe
(Medical doctor for gynecology and obstetrics)
Rathausstraße 25
68519 Viernheim
Tel. 06204 6071144

Desert Flower Center
Waldfriede (DFC)
Argentinische Allee 40
14163 Berlin-Zehlendorf
Tel. 030 81810-8582

Help hotline

The nationwide help hotline „Gewalt gegen Frauen“ („Violence against women and girls“) also offers help and information.

The help hotline is free and available 24h a day. Skilled staff members take the call, offer a quick and competent initial consultation and reassign to local institutions for further help. Interpreters are also available at the help hotline. Of course, every call is kept confidential and anonymous.



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