




## Teacher's Guide STOP! FGM!

### Introduction 1

- After the reading out loud the below excerpt from Waris Dirie's book, *Desert Flower*, to the students, ask the questions that follow to the students and allow them to have an open discussion. The students may share any background information they have of female genital mutilation (FGM) and share their thoughts on FGM and the pain it causes.
- I heard the sound of the dull blade sawing back and forth through my skin. When I think back, I honestly can't believe that this happened to me. I feel as if I were talking about somebody else. There's no way in the world I can explain what it feels like. It's like somebody is slicing through the meat of your thigh, or cutting off our arm, except this is the most sensitive part of your body. ... When I woke up, I thought we were finished, but now the worst of it had just begun. My blindfold was off and I saw the Killer Woman had piled next to her a stack of thorns from an acacia tree. She used these to puncture holes in my skin, then poked a strong white thread through the holes to sew me up. My legs were completely numb, but the pain between them was so intense that I wished I would die. I felt myself floating up, away from the ground, leaving my pain behind, and I hovered some feet above the scene looking down, watching this woman sew my body back together while my poor mother held me in her arms. At this moment I felt complete peace; I was no longer worried or afraid.
- What situation is this story describing?
- If you were the narrator in the story, how would you feel?
- Do you know anything about the practice this story is describing?
- Have you ever heard of female genital mutilation (FGM)?


Desert Flower



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- ## Prevalence of FGM
- What do the countries in the map have in common?
  - What do the numbers on the map mean?
  - Which country has the highest percentage?  
Have you ever heard of this country?
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- Legend:
- Red: 75% - 90%
  - Orange: 60% - 75%
  - Yellow: 45% - 60%
  - Green: 30% - 45%
  - Blue: 15% - 30%
  - Grey: No data
- Country labels on the map include: EGYPT, LIBYA, ALGERIA, TUNISIA, MOROCCO, SAHARA, MALI, NIGER, CHAD, CAMEROON, GABON, CONGO, ZAMBIA, BOTSWANA, NAMIBIA, SOUTH AFRICA, LESOTHO, SWAZILAND, MOZAMBIQUE, ZIMBABWE, TANZANIA, KENYA, UGANDA, RWANDA, BURUNDI, CONGO (Kin), DRC, ANGOLA, GUINEA, SIERRA LEONE, LEBANON, SYRIA, JORDAN, SAUDI ARABIA, YEMEN, OMAN, U.A.E., QATAR, KUWAIT, SAUDI ARABIA, YEMEN, OMAN, U.A.E., QATAR, KUWAIT.

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## 2. How did FGM begin?

- **4,000-year-old tradition:** FGM is seen as a practice that has been handed down from generation to generation in Africa for thousands of years. Although the exact origin is unknown, there are several conjectures.
- **Three conjectures of origin:**
  - ① It has been performed for disease prevention, healthy sex life after marriage, and hygienic reasons.
  - ② It started as a form of sacrifice to a fertility god.
  - ③ It began as a rite of passage to becoming an adult or becoming an official member of a tribe or nation.
- + **Nile River conjecture:** Egypt used to offer sacrifices to nature gods at the Nile River by cutting off female genitals and either burying them in the ground or throwing them into the Nile. It is said that FGM was held during harvest season or when the Nile flooded, and women went to the Nile River every month.

2. How did FGM begin?



- 4,000-year-old tradition
- Many conjectures about its origin
  - ① Prevention of disease, healthy sex life, and hygienic purposes
  - ② Sacrifice to fertility god
  - ③ Right of passage to become an adult

## 3. Why is FGM being performed?

- **Rite of passage to become an adult:** Some societies believe that the clitoral gland of the female genitals are considered traces of men remaining in the female body, so women have to go through the FGM to become complete adults.
- **Premarital purity:** Some societies believe that girls who go through FGM are more likely to keep their premarital purity and become virtuous women after marriage. In this regard, there is a perception that women who have not been circumcised are unreliable and unsophisticated.
- **Polygamic reasons:** FGM is practiced mainly in African and Islamic cultures, where polygamy is common. It is said that since it is not easy for a husband to take care of several wives at once under polygamy, he conducts FGM as a method to manage his wives.

3. Why is FGM being performed?

- Rite of passage to become an adult
- Mechanism to keep premarital purity
- Way to strengthen polygamic system



#### 4. How is FGM carried out?

- Egyptian female news reporter, Rhahab Azem's FGM experience
- I still can't forget the pain of surgery I had when I was 13 years old, a middle school student. One day when I was spending my summer vacation at my grandfather's house in Menopia, Northwest of Cairo, I was told by my aunt to "take a shower before going to the wedding." Soon I was in a car with my younger sister who was under 2 years old and we arrived a private clinic. Without any explanation, we were taken to a small room with only an operation table and a desk. 4 people, including my aunt and uncle gripped my arms and legs tightly to keep from moving. I cried and resisted for about 30 minutes, but it ended in vain. The four of us, including my younger sister and 2 cousins underwent surgery. In the end, my grandfather kissed me, saying, "Congratulations."
- **Most practitioners are village midwives:** In urban areas, specialists perform the operation, but in most cases, operations are done by unprofessional village midwives.
- **Girls aged 4~15 years old are in most danger:** Girls are taught from a young age that FGM is an essential rite of passage for living as a woman, but most of the time they are suddenly treated without being told the truth.
- Tools usually include a razor, scissor, broken piece of glass and a sharp stone. In general, FGM is performed without professional medical equipment in a place that has not been disinfected nor sanitized and usually without anesthesia. In some areas, folk remedies such as animal waste are applied to disinfect affected areas. Since most operations do not use anesthesia, they are usually performed before dawn so that the girls' screams will not be heard.
- **Post-FGM:** After the procedure, girls receive post-treatment or take rest in a separate room. However, they often suffer from side effects or complications from the procedure due to the lack of professional medical services. In most countries where FGM is allowed, FGM is regarded as a sacred right and duty. Therefore, festivals are held to celebrate FGM, and those who are circumcised are gifted with presents and colorful clothes.



## 5. How prevalent is FGM worldwide?

- **200 million people:** About 200 million women worldwide have experienced FGM (UN 2019)
- **1 every 9 seconds, 9800 people daily:** 36 million people are still circumcised every year (UN 2019)
- **Carried out in more than 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia:** According to World Health Organization, FGM is being conducted in more than 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Recently, FGM has been introduced to Europe and American countries, as ethnic groups with FGM traditions have immigrated to Europe, United States, and South America. It is estimated that 98% of women in Somalia, 97% in Guinea, 90% in Sierra Leone, 87% in Egypt, 83% in Eritrea, 74% in Ethiopia, 25% in Nigeria, 19% in Yemen, and 8% in Iraq were circumcised. (UNICEF 2013)
- + **98% of Somali women:** According to a 2016 UNICEF survey, 98% of women aged 15-49 had circumcision experience, and it also noted that it was common for girls at a younger age to be circumcised as well. Although the government passed a law banning FGM, illegal circumcision procedures continue under the protection of Somali conservative and religious groups. There are also reports of deaths from excessive bleeding caused by this procedure.
- **By 2050:** One-third of the world's female population will be born in 30 countries where FGM is still performed. This means that more than 500 million women are exposed to the risk of FGM. In particular, in Somalia, where the proportion of women who experience FGM is high, the number of women affected is expected to grow further as the female population is estimated to double in 2050 compared to 2017.

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5. How prevalent is FGM worldwide?

- 200 million women worldwide
- One case every 9 seconds, 9800 cases per day
- Carried out in more than 30 countries in Africa, Middle East, Asia
- By 2050...



## 6. How are women's lives affected by FGM?

- **Physical side effects and complications that last a lifetime:** FGM involves severe pain and bleeding. Most procedures are carried out under unhygienic conditions without anesthesia nor disinfection processes, resulting in many complications. Complications include - ① Death

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6. How are women's lives affected by FGM?



- Physical side effects and complications that last a lifetime
- Psychological effects

caused by excessive bleeding, ② Genital tissue swelling and infections, ③ Chronic anemia, ④ Urinary problems (painful urination that may take longer than 30 minutes), ⑤ Menstrual problems (painful menstruations, risk of full body infection due to difficulty in passing menstrual blood), ⑥ Risk of sepsis and tetanus due to lack of disinfection, ⑦ Risk of infection from various germs and viruses due to weakened immune system after the procedure, ⑧ Sexual problems (pain during intercourse) and increased risk of childbirth complications.

- **Psychological effects:** Procedures done without anesthesia can cause shock due to severe pain. After the procedure, women may experience emotional instability such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and low self-esteem that they may have to live with for the rest of their lives.

## 7. Women who become refugees to escape FGM

- **Women who flee to escape FGM:** More and more women are abandoning their homes to escape the intense pain and fear of FGM and its aftereffects. Of the 25,855 women and girls from countries that practice FGM who applied for refugee status in Europe, 71% (18,500) left their home countries to escape FGM (UNHCR 2014). Major countries of origin include Eritrea, Nigeria, Somalia, Guinea, and Ethiopia, which all have high prevalence of FGM.
- **Can FGM be a reason for refugee application?:** Refugees are people who have fled their country and crossed an international border to flee from persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. FGM is a life-threatening persecution that constitutes refugee conditions, and these women should therefore be protected. However, it is not easy for women who have left their hometowns to escape FGM to obtain refugee status. Most people involved in setting refugee policies do not view FGM as problematic because they believe it is a cultural practice and think that teenage girls and young women are mature enough to avoid FGM.



## 8. Efforts to eliminate FGM: Increasing awareness

- **FGM, a beautiful tradition?:** In many cases, women themselves do not recognize the injustice of FGM as the practice has been carried out for over thousands of years. Many people even think that FGM is a beautiful tradition that confirms one's femininity and that it allows one to be recognized as an official member of society.
- **Education to change the women's perception of FGM:** Women should be educated and be informed that FGM is not a righteous tradition that must be upheld but a cruel and inhumane act of violence. Unless women's own perceptions of FGM changes, the old practice will be difficult to eliminate.
- **Education to change the community's perception of FGM:** Countries that perform FGM believe that women who are not circumcised are evil and can spread diseases to the members of society. Women living in these communities are forced to choose FGM. The harmful effects of FGM should be widely made known and the community should be educated and encouraged to stop carrying out FGM.



## 8. Efforts to eliminate FGM: Human rights organizations

- **Violence of FGM became known worldwide in the 1990s:** FGM was considered an African tradition until world-famous fashion model Waris Dirie, who had undergone FGM as a young girl growing up in Somalia, exposed its inhumane violence to the Western society in 1997. Waris Dirie served as the United Nations Goodwill Ambassador for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation from 1997 to 2003. During her tenure, she highlighted FGM as the most representative and symbolic international problem that suppresses women's human rights.
- **Global campaign for the elimination of FGM:** The worldwide coverage by media on FGM and the testimonies of FGM victims led to an increase in worldwide awareness and recognition of FGM as a problem. Amid this trend, international human rights groups such as UNICEF, Desert Flower Foundation, and Tostan carried out various activities to eradicate FGM practices. These human rights groups




have spread awareness of FGM as an act of violence against human rights and not a tradition to be upheld and have taken the lead in legally prohibiting FGM.

## 8. Efforts to eliminate FGM: International community

- February 6th – International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation:** In 2003, the first lady of Nigeria, Mrs. Stella Obasanjo, officially declared “Zero Tolerance to FGM” in Africa during a conference organized by the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children. Then in 2012, the UN General Assembly designated February 6th as the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation.
- Legal ban on all forms of FGM by the African Union (AU):** In July 2003, government representatives from the AU member countries gathered in Maputo, Mozambique and adopted the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, or the Maputo Protocol. Article 5 of the Maputo Protocol emphasizes the elimination of harmful practices, referring to a ban on female genital mutilation and other traditional practices that are harmful to women.
- UN’s Sustainable Development Goal 5.3:** Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 is to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.” The third target under this SDG is to “eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations.” Various activities are being carried out with the goal of eliminating FGM by 2030.
- Still a common practice:** Since after the 2000s, many countries have enacted legal bans on FGM, and there has been constant declaration of eradication of FGM led by community leaders. However, FGM has not been completely eradicated, and news of deaths caused by FGM are still being heard.



## 9. People who are fighting to eradicate FGM

- **Waris Dirie introduction video:**  
 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUS68O-sePk>
- **Waris Dirie:** A Somali supermodel and a former UN Goodwill Ambassador for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation. After leaving Somalia, where 98% of women go through FGM, and settling in England, Dirie became a model by chance. While building her career as a supermodel as well as appearing in commercials and movies, she confessed in an interview with the magazine Marie Claire in 1997 that she experienced FGM as a child. She then served as UN's Goodwill Ambassador for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation from 1997 to 2003, informing the world about the cruelty of FGM, a tradition with thousands of years of history, and saved hundreds of millions of young girls from the risks of FGM by actively supporting the enactment of international laws to eradicate this brutal practice. For this contribution, she was awarded the 2019 Sunhak Peace Prize.
- "After I campaigned for the eradication of FGM, the number of FGM cases in Somalia dropped from 98% to 8%, and from 70% to 7% in the whole Africa. But the problem is that the practice still continues."



## 9. People who are fighting to eradicate FGM

- **Molly Melching:** American human rights activist. She has lived in Senegal, West Africa since 1974 and founded the non-governmental organization Tostan to encourage the abandonment of FGM. As a result, many villages in Senegal have declared the banning of FGM.
- "When she first started this work, she didn't know anything and started with nothing. She just wanted to give educational opportunities to those who couldn't go to school and hoped that the lives of the 300 residents of the Saam Njaay village could become better. At the time, she never imagined that this would happen. Nearly 3,000 villages in Senegal have declared to end FGM. Fifty-eight villages in Gambia, 43 villages in Guinea-Bissau, 322 villages in Guinea, 7 villages in Mali, and 34 villages in Somalia also



joined the declaration.”

- From *However Long the Night*, a book on Molly Melching's work that saved millions of African girls from the dangers of FGM

## 10. What can we do to eliminate FGM?

- **Taking interest:** In today's world where various ethnicities and cultures coexist and actively interact, FGM is a shared problem. As such, everyone needs to take interest and work together to eliminate the life-threatening practice of FGM.
- **Taking action:** We can share with people about the reality of FGM and its harmful effects and support FGM victims through international and non-governmental organizations.

