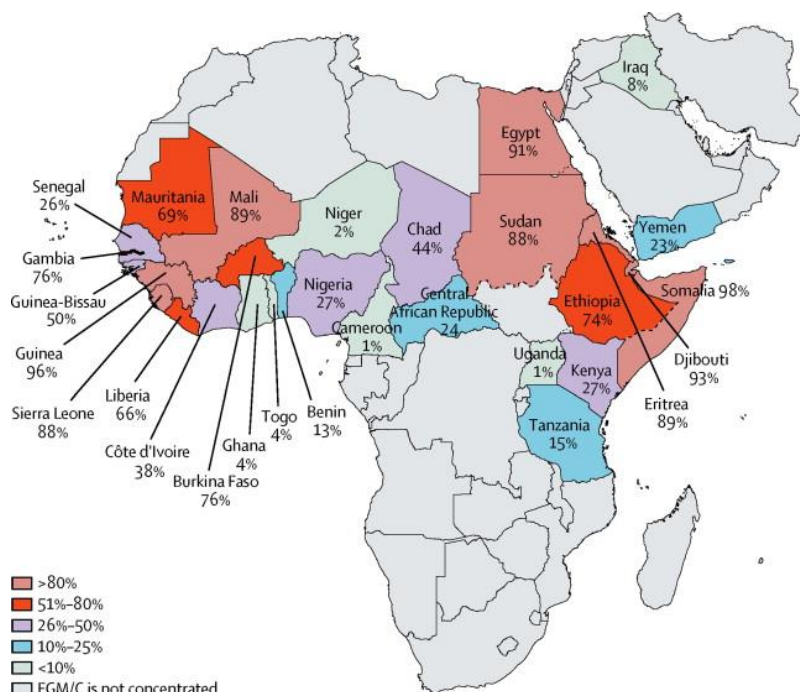




Female Genital Mutilation & Its Impact on African Women

Female genital mutilation or FGM is an inhumane procedure performed on girls as young as six years old in many African countries. This practice has been described as a “medical procedure” like male circumcision performed to adhere to “religious” conforms.

According to a report by UNICEF, at least 200 million girls and women alive today living in 31 countries have undergone FGM. The referenced map shows the countries that have the highest prevalence for conducting FGM.



Here is what happens. The young girls are carried into a room, often kicking and screaming if they are old enough to understand what they are about to endure. They are held down by family members and those assisting with the procedure. They are cut with a sharp



object, usually a razor blade (like the one pictured) that has been rinsed with water and used from person to person. The child is given no anesthesia and is told the procedure is to “make a woman out of her” and to ensure she is not looked down upon as being less of a woman for not having the procedure performed. She would be perceived as “unclean” to a man and undesirable.

The World Health Organization (WHO) classified FGM into four broad categories in 1995 and again in 2007:



- **Type I:** Partial or total removal of the clitoris and/or the prepuce
- **Type II:** Partial or total removal of the clitoris and labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora
- **Type III:** Narrowing of the vaginal orifice by cutting and bringing together the labia minora and/or the labia majora to create a type of seal, with or without excision of the clitoris. In most instances, the cut edges of the labia are stitched together, which is referred to as ‘infibulation’
- **Type IV:** All other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, for example: pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterization

The young girls who survived this procedure, who are now adults, still struggle with the effects from enduring such long and painful trauma. The openings that were left in their vaginal areas were small enough, not large enough, for urination and penetration, which in and of itself, remains exceedingly painful. They endure infections and scarring—internally and externally. The parts of our bodies that make us women were not just violated at such a young age, but butchered and unrecognizable.

I had the great pleasure of meeting a young Somali woman who suffered from FGM at six years old. She is now ready to tell her story, and she is allowing FLuidity to co-author it. I can hardly wait for you to meet her. We hope her story will highlight the atrocities occurring in Africa and other countries. Young girls are losing their lives and their voices as a result of FGM. Education is key!