Dear Faith Leader,

Thank you for picking up this toolkit. It takes a lot of courage to begin open, honest conversations about harmful practices that are deeply entrenched in a community’s culture and tradition. We commend you for taking this first step to eradicating female genital cutting (FGC) and promote the health and wellbeing of girls and women in your community.

No matter what your stance has been in the past, you can make a big difference in helping your congregation and community think more deeply about these practices. Whether you have never spoken to your community about FGC, or whether you have been speaking out against this practice for a long time, we offer you ways of starting or re-energizing the conversations around such issues. Your congregation looks to you for guidance and support; this means that you are uniquely positioned to make real and lasting change in the lives of girls today, and for generations to come.

We understand that FGC will likely be difficult to discuss. This toolkit is designed to educate and make it easier for you to talk about this harmful practice. In it, you will find resources that will arm you with medical facts and theological references that speak out against FGC, and ways to answer the tough questions you may face along the way.

We have worked with local and international partners and with faith leaders from diverse faith backgrounds across Africa to develop this toolkit. We recognize that eradicating FGC is a vital step to promote the health and well-being of girls and women, which will greatly improve the health and success of communities and nations as a whole.

We urge you to read this toolkit, and understand the value of comprehensive knowledge about the realities of FGC. Please feel free to share this approach with peers of your own faith or across faiths in your community. Our hope is that, by equipping you with information and useful tools, you can become a part of the movement to change the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of communities – and the lives of girls who need your support the most.

Thank you for joining us in our mission to empower girls by eliminating FGC.
FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING (FGC)
Addressing Harmful Traditional Practices in Your Community: A Faith Leader Toolkit

TABLE OF CONTENTS
Get Started: How to Use This Toolkit
Picking up this toolkit for the first time? We suggest you start here.
1) Let’s Get Started
2) Some Common Questions

Teach Yourself: Facts about FGC
Key facts & information to help you inform your community about FGC
1) Key Facts about FGC, A Basic Information Sheet with Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
   • A Christian Perspective
   • A Muslim Perspective
2) Scriptural and theological guides related to FGC and its impact
   • A Guide for Christian Faith Leaders
   • A Guide for Muslim Faith Leaders
3) Anatomy Lesson (including anatomy flipchart)

Begin the Conversation:
4 Conversations That Healthy Communities Should Have
Faith leaders touch the lives of their communities in many ways: at weekly prayers, during lifecycle events, during individual counseling, or out in the community. Each of these interactions can be a teachable moment – an opportunity to discuss health and well-being with your community and share important messages. Here are 4 key conversations that all faith leaders regardless of faith – can have with their community:

Eliminating FGC: All Human Life Has Dignity
• Conversation 1: Our bodies are the creations of God/Allah, the perfect creator. If this is true, does female genital cutting reduce the dignity of human life?
• Conversation 2: Medical facts have proven that FGC is not good for women. Why do we cut out a healthy, beautiful, perfectly functioning body part?
• Conversation 3: FGC is harmful, but used anyway in an attempt to “guarantee” virginity in girls. Does FGC punish the innocent before a crime is even committed?
• Conversation 4: How can responsible, healthy, and productive communities work to eliminate FGC?
Engage Women:
All Human Life has Dignity
Module 4
This interactive workshop provides an opportunity for women to learn about FGC, its negative effects, and the truths behind the myths they may have encountered. The workshop in this module can be presented in one unified session, or it can be excerpted and spread out across several meetings as necessary. Furthermore, it can also serve as an inspiration for further workshops and open discussions!

Engage Youth:
Girls, Boys, &/or Mixed groups the dignity of human life
Module 5
This interactive investigation is tailored specifically for youth groups within your faith institution – whether girls alone, boys, or mixed groups– providing them with thoughtful opportunities to understand FGC and its consequences. How to engage different subgroups of youth will depend on local circumstances, but the key messages remain constant: everyone can do something to stop FGC!

Activity Kit:
Everything You Need to Engage Your Community
The activity kit includes the anatomy flipchart and accompanying lesson to be used as part of modules 4 and 5.
Get Started: How to Use This Toolkit

Picking up this toolkit for the first time? We suggest you start here.

Let’s Get Started: What’s the Big Idea?
The goal of this toolkit is to help YOU to protect the health and wellness of your community by eliminating FGC, and improving the health and wellbeing of your community’s women and girls. Specifically, we want to make sure that you know about the risks of FGC and how to engage your community in a conversation about this harmful traditional practice.

How Can I Use This Toolkit?
We know that there is a lot here, but don’t worry, you don’t have to do it all. Every faith leader is different, and every community is different. You should pick and choose the pieces that work best for you.

Some faith leaders may have been involved in FGC work for a long time, whereas many may have only heard about the negative effects of FGC recently. Not to worry, we’ve got something for everyone. Here’s how you can get started…
### There is Something for Everyone…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>About you</th>
<th>If you had never heard about the negative effects of FGC before…</th>
<th>If you know about FGC but have never spoken to your community about it…</th>
<th>If you’re an expert on the topic and have already begun having conversations with your community…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Where to start</td>
<td>Read Over Module 2: “Teach Yourself.”</td>
<td>Familiarize yourself with the basics on FGC in Module 2 and then begin with Module 3: “Begin the Conversation.”</td>
<td>Familiarize yourself with FGC in Module 2. Review the curricula for “Engage Your Congregation” (Modules 4-5), and select one or two that you can begin to implement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Next steps…</td>
<td>Review Module 3: “Begin the Conversation.” Pick two of the conversations to have with your community and find a time to do them</td>
<td>Select one or two of the curricula from “Engage Your Congregation” (Modules 4-5) and implement it in your community.</td>
<td>Implement the remaining curricula from Modules 4-5, and review the Conversations in Module 3.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some Common Questions
You Might Be Thinking About…

What if I don’t feel comfortable talking about FGC?
FGC can definitely be a difficult topic to discuss. It involves the sadness of loss and disease as well as the difficult issues of sex and sexuality. However, conversations don’t have to just focus on these challenging topics: this toolkit is about equipping communities to live full, healthy, and happy lives. That’s what the conversation is really about.

One important thing to know is that many in your community know and hold strong beliefs about FGC. However, often times the sources of information are either unreliable or not based on fact. Their beliefs may reflect incorrect information about FGC, and they may not fully understand its harm to women and girls. That’s one reason why it’s so important that you be an active part of the conversation. If you don’t, then you are allowing the conversation to occur without the guidance and wisdom that you can offer.

OK, but do I have to talk about sex?
You don’t have to talk about any particular topic any more than you are comfortable. However, one thing that we have learned is that communities that speak openly and honestly about all the issues related to FGC are best able to protect themselves against unwarranted harm. And yes, sometimes that means dealing with issues of sex and sexuality. However, you don’t have to do it by yourself: there are lots of good resources in this toolkit that will help you address these issues in a way that is sensitive to the concerns of faith communities.

What if I don’t know a lot about FGC?
Don’t worry! This toolkit isn’t about giving you all the answers; it’s about giving you the tools to help reduce the risk of injury, disease, and death through the harmful practice of FGC on your community’s women and girls. There are definitely some important things that you should know about FGC before you begin this process, such as what type of harm can FGC cause. However, all of that is in Module 2: “Teach Yourself.”
More important than having all the answers is raising important questions in a supportive and caring environment – and as a faith leader, that’s one of the things that you do best.

What if someone in my community asks me a question that I don’t know the answer to?
There’s no way to be prepared for every question that someone might ask. If someone asks a question that you don’t know the answer to, don’t feel like you have to make up an answer. Just tell them that that’s a great question, that you aren’t sure of the answer right now, and that you want to make sure that they get an accurate answer so you are going to get back to them about it. Then, you can consult any of the resources that are available to you.

I’m busy. How will I find the time to talk about FGC?
There’s some good news here: you don’t have to do it all yourself! In fact, it’s great if members of your congregation or community take on leadership roles. This creates more community engagement, and also means makes your job much more manageable. For instance, if you already have a woman’s group, the leader of that group might actually be the best person in your community to lead Module 4: Engage Women. Similarly, if someone in your community is particularly good at working with youth, they could lead Module 5: Engage Youth. However, before you assign anyone in your community to lead Modules 4-5, it is imperative that they read and completely understand the information in Modules 1-2, so that they can effectively engage these particular groups in knowledgeable conversations about FGC.

The other piece of good news is that talking about FGC doesn’t have to be a distraction from your regular responsibilities as a faith leader. What we have found is that faith leaders who advocate for the elimination of FGC find it to be an extension of their core role – ministering and supporting the needs of their communities. Supporting the health and wellness of women and girls does not need to be a distraction – it’s an important way that you can support the spiritual and physical needs of your community.
Teach Yourself: Facts about FGC

Key facts & information to help you inform your community about FGC

Introduction

FGC can be a very difficult topic to talk about – generations of misinformation and secrecy have led many communities to believe that this practice is good, and demanded by tradition or religion. However, you can equip yourself with knowledge and facts about the devastating effects this harmful practice has on girls and on communities as a whole. Once you have this knowledge, you can begin to speak to your community and congregation about these issues with authority.

The following information sheets provide the key medical facts about FGC – they also provide answers to some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) that may arise about this practice and its place in your community. These information sheets have many uses in your conversations with your community about FGC – it is up to you.

Here are some of the ways you can use these information sheets, and their accompanying FAQs.

- They are a quick way to brush up on your knowledge about FGC.
- They can be used as a quick reference for you when answering tough questions from your community about FGC.
- They can be given to your fellow faith and community leaders as a factual resource on the practices of FGC.
- They can be given to literate members of your congregation as educational resources on FGC.

Instructions

Read the following information, and absorb all the information on them. Begin with the key facts. Once you feel you understand the key facts about both FGC, move on to the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). Some of these FAQs seek to address cultural and historical ideas, not medical facts; therefore, when you read these FAQs, ask yourself if you agree with the answers. If you have questions that these information sheets cannot answer, take this as an opportunity to seek out further information from a trusted source about FGC. If you agree with the answers to each FAQ, think of some other questions that members of your community may ask in a conversation about FGC, and how you might answer them. The possibilities are endless.
Key Facts about FGC, A Basic Information Sheet

1) Female Genital Cutting (FGC) is illegal in our country.

2) FGC can cause infection, whether from the procedure itself or complications afterwards.

3) FGC can cause obstetric fistula, a condition causing incontinence of urine or feces, and many other damaging physical and mental issues for the woman affected.

4) FGC makes marital relations and childbirth/delivery extremely painful, due to an excess of scar tissue and an obstructed vaginal opening.

5) FGC can cause infant and maternal mortality, due to the obstructed vaginal opening.

6) FGC is not healthy circumcision; it is instead like removing the entire male member.
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about Female Genital Cutting (FGC): A Christian Perspective

Below you will find both Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and their answers, relative to Christian perspectives on female genital cutting (FGC) and its negative impact on health and well-being, as well as Biblical references.

Q: What is the Church’s view on FGC?
Several Christian denominations have issued official statements declaring FGC as harmful, and a crime before God and humanity. FGC is a tradition that predates Christianity. It is not condoned in the Bible or any other holy texts. There are some traditions like FGC that, despite being harmful have become accepted. Many faith leaders in fact agree that FGC is harmful and non-Christian, but until now have felt powerless to do anything against the social customs and tradition, or felt it was not their place to interfere. It may seem as though Christianity condones or supports FGC. However, research indicates that most Faith Leaders who condone or support FGC do so because they do not want to incur social stigma by violating the local tradition.

Q: What are the actual effects of FGC? What are the medical facts?
FGC is not equivalent to male circumcision; male circumcision is the removal of foreskin, FGC is the removal of an entire functioning organ. Removal of the clitoris and labia minora is equivalent to removal of the entire male member. FGC can cause infection (including HIV), whether from the procedure itself when non-sterile blades are used, or complications afterwards. There are many nerves and blood vessels in the female genitalia, so a girl will experience excruciating pain and in some cases bleed to death during the procedure. FGC is thought to reduce a burning, dysfunctional sexual desire: in reality, it does not reduce desire, but instead causes agonizing pain during sexual intercourse. FGC scars are painful, and often tear during sexual relations and childbirth, causing dangerous amounts of bleeding. FGC can cause fistula, which means a tear between the urethra and vaginal opening, leading to incontinence of urine or feces. FGC can also cause infertility, as a result of infection or fistula. FGC can cause infant and maternal mortality, due an obstructed vaginal opening. In summary, there are no medical benefits to FGC.
FGC can lead to serious complications during childbirth. A woman who has not undergone FGC has a better chance of safely delivering a healthy baby.

Q: If FGC is harmful, why have our communities practiced it so long without punishment?
Generations of practice can often make tradition seem like truth, even if some of those traditions are harmful to our children. FGC is illegal in our country, but these traditions and their attached social stigmas are very strong. Many law enforcement officials fear social stigma themselves, and are therefore reluctant to fully punish offenders. Additionally, a lack of money, organization, and resources on the legal level makes it very hard to enforce laws against FGC. However, God commands us to seek what is right and proclaim the truth, even in the face of opposition. FGC is illegal in our country, and as Peter 2:13-16, says, "Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil." Anti-FGC laws agree perfectly with God’s will and word in the Bible – therefore, as Christians, we should obey all of these laws.

A scriptural guide for Christian faith leaders who seek to eradicate FGC.

Below are key messages developed by Christian faith leaders, along with scriptural and other references that support each message in relation to eliminating FGC.

1) All human life has dignity.
   i. We are perfect creations of the perfect creator. “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful” (Psalm 139:14).
   ii. FGC, or the removal of a beautiful, healthy, functioning body part, is calling ugly/offensive what God has made clean. “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (Acts 10:15).

2) Both boys and girls should be treated with love and respect—on an equal basis.
   iii. In John 13:34-35, Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” This means that we should love both boys and girls in our families equally, and not value one above the other. Practices like FGC and early marriage imply that we value boys above girls; this is not how God wants us to treat each other.

3) God’s creation is perfect.
   iv. After creating both man and woman, “God saw all that he had made, and (said) it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31)
   v. FGC, when used to ensure virginity before marriage and fidelity after marriage, is punishing the innocent before a sin was even committed – this type of injustice towards the innocent deeply hurts God.
      i. In fact, God never intended for us to consider any part of our bodies shameful or ugly: “Adam and his wife were both naked, and felt no shame” (Genesis 2:25). It was only after the fall of Adam and Eve, when they were tempted by Satan, that they covered their bodies out of shame. “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves” (Genesis 3:7). This is not to say that we should go around naked in our daily lives, but to show that God never originally created humans with offensive, shameful parts that need removal. After the fall, still under the influence of evil, they concluded that sexual/reproductive organs are shameful. Still, however, God did not say that these parts need to be removed. Believing that these parts are so disgusting and
dangerous that they require removal is a further corruption.

vi. FGC is neither beneficial to healthy family life nor is it a healthy covenant with God; instead, it is an insult to God through an act of violence and humiliation toward innocent women and girls. The Old Testament signs of covenant included MALE – ONLY circumcision. Genesis 12:2-3: “Every male among you shall be circumcised.” In these days, it was a sign of closeness with God, something that set them apart from the nonbelievers.
   i. However, 1st Corinthians 7:19, St. Paul said, “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing.” As the Word of God (the Bible) does not contradict itself, the above verses mean that male circumcision was a sign of covenant during the Old Testament times, but in the New Testament circumcision does not have any religious significance. It is only a health measure, which does not affect the male penis in the same way it affects the female clitoris/other parts.
   ii. FGC is not the same as male circumcision. Medically speaking, the glans clitoris is equivalent to the head of the penis – to cut either off is a gross affront to human dignity, as it deprives victims of the potential joy found in healthy marital relations.

4) Knowledgeable, responsible, happy, healthy, and productive communities work to eliminate harmful practices like FGC.
   • The proven harms of FGC are great, and there are no actual benefits.
   i. FGC can cause infertility, as well as obstructed labor and other birth complications.
   ii. FGC can cause infections, whether during the procedure or afterwards.
      i. FGC has life-long consequences, and can even cause death.
      ii. FGC does NOT eliminate sexual desire.
   • We do not cut off our hands so that we might not steal, for the desire/command to steal comes from the brain and not from the hand.
      i. Indeed, according to Matthew 5:27-28, sexual sin, or adultery, includes lustful looks and thoughts - which are not removed by cutting the genitalia: “You have heard it said, you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that everyone who looks at another with lustful intent has already committed adultery in their hearts.” Therefore, cutting the genitalia to prevent sexual immorality does useless, irreversible harm and no good.
      ii. God commands us not to punish the innocent, but instead to protect them. “Help the weak” (Thessalonians 5:23). Young girls cannot defend themselves properly when others want to harm a part of their body – but we can be a voice for the voiceless by ending the practice in our communities.

The practice of FGC does not just hurt one girl; it hurts the entire community, and robs it of its dignity.
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about Female Genital Cutting (FGC): A Muslim Perspective

Below you will find both Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) relative to Muslim perspectives on FGC and its negative impact on health and wellbeing, as well as Muslim scriptural references.

Q: What are the actual effects of FGC? What are the medical facts?
FGC is not equivalent to male circumcision; male circumcision is the removal of foreskin, FGC is the removal of an entire functioning organ. Removal of the clitoris and labia minora is equivalent to removal of the entire male member. FGC can cause infection (including HIV), whether from the procedure itself when non-sterile blades are used, or complications afterwards. There are many nerves and blood vessels in the female genitalia, so a girl will experience excruciating pain and in some cases bleed to death during the procedure. FGC is thought to reduce a burning, dysfunctional sexual desire. In reality, it does not reduce desire, but instead causes agonizing pain during sexual intercourse. FGC scars are painful, and often tear during sexual relations and childbirth, causing dangerous amounts of bleeding. FGC can cause fistula, which means incontinence of urine or feces. FGC can also cause infertility, as a result of infection or fistula. FGC can cause infant and maternal mortality, due to obstruction of the vaginal opening. In summary, there are no medical benefits to FGC.

Q: If FGC is harmful, why have the faith leaders blessed our ceremonies and condoned it for so long?
FGC is a tradition that predates Islam, dating back to “al-gubariyyah,” or, “the era of ignorance.” It is not officially sanctioned in any holy texts. Tradition is very strong, and is often accepted as the truth over time. While most tradition is beneficial, some are very harmful, especially to our children. FGC has continued in our communities for many reasons. Because discussion of sexuality is often taboo, people have wrongfully remained ignorant about the facts of FGC, and simply relied on ideas passed on from previous generations. Low levels of education and literacy mean that many of our people, and even many of our traditional and faith leaders, lack proper knowledge and training on the topic. Many of our faith leaders in fact believe that FGC is harmful, but feel powerless to do anything against the social customs and tradition, or feel it is not their place to interfere. However, Allah commands us to seek knowledge, know what is right, and proclaim the truth, even in the face of opposition: "Whoever follows a path in the pursuit of knowledge, Allah will make a path to Paradise easy for him" (Hadith of Al-Bukhaari).
FGC can lead to serious complications during childbirth. A woman who has not undergone FGC has a better chance of safely delivering a healthy baby.
Scriptural and Theological Guides Related to Early Marriage (EM): A Guide for Muslim Faith Leaders

A guide for Muslim faith leaders who seek to eradicate FGC

Below are key messages developed by Muslim faith leaders, along with scriptural and other references that support that message in relation to eliminating FGC.

1) All human life has dignity.
   - We are all perfect creations of Allah, the perfect creator.
     i. Cutting or harming a body part that we were born with when there is nothing wrong with it, as happens in FGC, goes against Allah’s wishes.
     ii. “…and there is no changing Allah’s creation. And that is the proper religion but many people do not know” (Quran 30:30)
     iii. “…and make not your own hands contribute to your destruction” (Quran 2:195)

2) Both boys and girls should be treated with love and respect.
   - Quran 60:8 “Allah loves the equitable.”
     i. We are all fellow human beings, not one physically inferior to the other: "Assuredly, women are the twin halves of men." (Ṣaḥīḥ reported by Abu-Dawud (RA) This is physically, factually true — cutting of the clitoris is equivalent to the cutting off of the entire male penis. We are physically wired very similarly, just constructed differently. Allah wants us to act according to the truth, and FGC is not in line with this Quranic ideal. In other words, gender inequality is not Islamic.
     ii. Acts such as FGC punish the innocent in the absence of a crime—which is an injustice before Allah. The Prophet did not recommend it for any of the women in his house, nor did he approve of the practice when he saw it being done.

Hadith of Ummu-Attiya: This is the Hadith most commonly used to link FGC to Islam. The Hadith relates that the Prophet said to a woman of Medina, a circumciser called Ummu-Attiyah, “O Umm ‘Attiyah, ‘ashimmi’ and do not exaggerate; as doing so will preserve the fairness of the woman’s face and satisfy the husband.” As one Islamic scholar noted, one line of this hadith attempts to express the reaction of the Prophet to the screaming of the girl being circumcised. “The Prophet held his head and shared her agony” for a while—meaning he disagreed with this pre-Islamic, harmful traditional practice. Cognizant of the contextual interpretation of the Hadith, other scholars believe that during that time, the Prophet was not authoritative enough to strongly denounce such widely tolerated traditional practice.
• Quran 4:124 “But the believers who do good works, both men and women, shall enter paradise.”
• Men and women are equal in the sight of Allah.
• FGC is a practice that can harm a girl for the rest of her life, affecting her ability to enjoy a relationship with her husband, and often making childbirth complicated and unbearable.

3) Allah’s creation is perfect.

• “Verily we created man of the best stature” (Quran: 96:4).
  i. The beauty of a human body is to be left as it was created by Allah, unless there is an authentic basis allowing interference with it. Authentic bases include medical indications and the clearly stated male circumcision. Conversely, FGC could be seen as an insult to Allah that is an issue to repent/confess for saying (in action): your creation is imperfect, let me correct it for you! Of course, the underpinning argument is that Allah has created women abnormally, and that we need to take corrective measures. Current medical science, however, agrees with perfect creation.
• FGC is not a form of circumcision at all, anatomically; therefore, it is not a healthy covenant with Allah, as with male circumcision.
  i. It is instead an insult to Allah through an act of violence and humiliation on innocent people.
  ii. It is not equivalent to male circumcision – in fact, it is like removing the entire male member.
• “Oh you messenger [Muhammad] proclaim [the message] which has been sent down to you from your Lord. And if you do not then you have not conveyed His message” (Quran: 5: 67).
  i. If FGC were a religious requirement, the Prophet would have explicitly taught it, and his wives and daughters would have been circumcised. The Prophet taught about correct Islamic behavior in all aspects of life, including toilet manners, table manners, relations between husband and wife, and so on. It is not logical, therefore, that he would be silent on a matter that affects an important human reproductive organ.
• Kindness means never inflicting harm unless necessary – and even then, mercy is far more admirable
4) **Knowledgeable, responsible, happy, healthy, and productive communities work to eliminate harmful practices like FGC.**

- The harms of FGC outweigh the benefits.
  
  i. FGC can cause infertility, as well as obstructed labor, and other birth complications.
  
  ii. FGC can cause infections, whether during the procedure or afterwards.
  
  iii. FGC has lifelong health consequences, and can lead to death.

- “And if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he/she has saved the life of the whole people” (Quran 5:32).
  
  i. There is no question that stopping the practice of FGC saves and greatly improves lives. True heroes in the community are those who combat harmful and deadly practices like FGC.
  
  ii. Halting unnecessarily cruel practices like FGC can improve the lives of the whole community – girls who are healthier are happier, and enter into marriages better-prepared to enjoy a good relationship with their husbands.

- According to the Quran, any act that amounts to changing Allah’s creation is considered the work of Satan.
  
  i. Iblis (Satan) who said, “Verily I will mislead them and surely arouse in them false desires and I will order them to slit the ears of cattle and indeed I will order them to change the nature created by Allah…” (Quran: 4: 119).

- The practice of FGC does not just hurt one girl; it hurts the entire community, and robs it of its full potential.
  
  i. “Allah changes not the condition of a people until they change that which is in their hearts…” (Quran 13:11). We cannot make great changes in our communities until we change our thoughts and feelings towards all humans – this means recognizing the full humanity of and showing compassion towards girls and women, as with all people.

The practice of FGC does not just hurt one girl; it hurts the entire community, and robs it of its dignity.
Teach Yourself: Medical Facts about FGC

Anatomy Lesson
The basics on FGC:
- Speaking Guide – Christian
- Speaking Guide – Muslim

Anatomy Flipchart

Female Anatomy Lesson
THE BASICS OF Female Genital Cutting

Introduction
Thank you for picking up this guide, and for being willing to engage your community in honest discussion about a topic that may be fairly taboo. This anatomy lesson can serve as a guide for dispelling myths about the female anatomy, and discussing the negative effects of FGC on the human body. Many of your participants may have never seen material like this before, so please feel free to present the material as you deem appropriate – in youth groups, for example, you may modify the lesson and language as necessary, and if you see fit, omit showing the participants the diagrams, instead, using them to facilitate a discussion of the myths regarding female anatomy, and how FGC hurts girls.

Instructions
There are three major types of FGC performed on young girls, and this anatomy lesson intends to show what each form of FGC looks like in comparison to a set of healthy, normal female external genitalia.

This guide consists of four medical diagrams, with labels, and a speaking guide for each:

1) A diagram showing a set of healthy, normal female external genitalia, without FGC.

2) A diagram showing a set of female genitalia subjected to FGC Type I (removal of the prepuce, or removal of the prepuce and partial or total removal of the clitoris).
4) A diagram showing a set of female genitalia subjected to FGC Type II (removal of the prepuce, clitoris, and all or part of the labia minora).

5) A diagram showing a set of female genitalia subjected to FGC Type III, also known as infibulation (removal of the prepuce, clitoris, and the labia minora, with the labia majora sewn together covering the urethra and vagina, leaving only a small hole for urine and menstrual fluid).

After presenting each anatomy illustration, ask the following questions:

6) Is there anything you find unclear about the diagram?

7) Is there anything offensive about the diagram?

8) How would you suggest we improve the visual aids (including eliminating them).

Included also in this lesson is a speaking guide with a wrap-up/conclusion detailing the main medical facts that dispel many of the common myths associated with FGC. Read and familiarize yourself with this speaking guide, and make sure you understand all of the information.

We understand that this may be used for a variety of audiences, including youth and adults of all ages. Please use the speaking guide as you deem appropriate, depending on your audience, their age, and their level of knowledge – you may modify your language and mode of presentation as you see fit, it’s up to you. Remember, however, that this is all useful, vital information that communities need to know in order to change their knowledge of and attitudes towards FGC, and work towards eliminating this harmful practice altogether.
Myths, Facts, and the Reality of FGC: A Christian Perspective

Speaking Guide:

“I want to begin by thanking you all for being so willing to listen and discuss about a very important topic that affects all of us, whether we are men or women, boys or girls. We are going to learn about the female body, and the parts that God, our creator, has chosen to put there.

“Many of you may know about the practice of female genital cutting, or FGC. This is something that is done to girls and women in our community for many reasons. Some feel that cutting the female genitalia is a practice that is pleasing to God, and that it is required for a woman to be a good wife and mother. Others believe that the female genitalia will grow to the ground, or that they will produce worms and a foul smell if they are left uncut. Still others believe that a woman without FGC will be unable to have children, and that FGC is the only way a woman can live a happy, healthy life.

“What do all of these ideas have in common? They are false, and based on generations of myths and misunderstandings. FGC is a practice that has no health benefits for any girl or woman.

“I would like to ask you now: what have you heard about FGC in your life? What reasons have people used to justify it as a good practice?”

[OPEN UP TO GROUP FOR DISCUSSION, THEN COME BACK TO SPEAKING GUIDE]

“One thing you all must know is that many of the reasons given to justify FGC are based on myths, not on truths. FGC does not make a woman more fertile, or able to have more children. In fact, FGC can often make a woman unable to have children. Many may think a girl needs FGC to keep her genitalia from growing to the ground. Still others believe that the female genitalia are “dirty” or “ugly” without FGC. Here are the facts: the female genitalia will not grow to the ground, nor are they “dirty” or “ugly” when left alone. FGC often leaves women and girls with a lifetime of unnecessary pain and suffering. Finally, FGC is not pleasing to God – in fact, it is quite the opposite, since FGC is like telling God, ‘Your creation is imperfect, let me correct it for you?’”

No Blame or Shame, Just Change!
“Even if we have promoted the practice of FGC ourselves, or had it done to us, we can stop the practice of FGC in our community right now. How? By educating ourselves about the real, medical facts behind FGC, learning more about our bodies and ourselves, and having open, honest discussions about how these things affect our daily lives. Eliminating practices like FGC can and will make our lives, and the lives of our children and all generations after, better and healthier.

“Now, let’s begin by looking at some diagrams of the female anatomy, and see how a normal, healthy female genitalia compares to one that has been circumcised.”

[NOTE: THE FOUR SMALLER PICTURES BELOW EACH REFER TO THE CORRESPONDING INDIVIDUAL PICTURES ON THE LARGER PICTURE]

**Picture A: Uncircumcised (normal) female genitalia**

“This is a picture of the female genitalia, as viewed when a girl or woman is lying on her back, with her legs bent sideways. I understand that you may have never seen anything like this before, or you may be shocked and ask yourself, “why is this disgusting picture being shown to us?” To that, I answer that this is nothing to be considered disgusting. The Lord God created both men and women, and made their parts wonderfully complex. According to Genesis 1:31, “God saw all that He made,” including the female genitalia, “and said that it was very good.” Therefore, God has made our bodies perfectly, so we should not be shocked by seeing diagrams of our own bodies, in their natural state, in His house of worship. Additionally, we should not call any of our parts “disgusting”: Acts 10:15 affirmed that “we should not call impure what God has made clean.”

“There are six main parts in the healthy, normal female genitalia: the clitoris, the prepuce, the labia minora, the labia majora, the urethral opening, and the vagina.”

*[POINT TO URETHRAL OPENING]* “This is the urethral opening. Many may confuse this with the vagina, since all fluids seem to come from the same opening in a woman’s body. However, the urethral opening is very different from the vagina, in that its sole purpose is for riddling the body of toxins through urine. *[POINT TO VAGINA]* The vagina is the opening through which a woman delivers a baby, and experiences sexual intercourse. This opening is very complex and sensitive, and requires many layers of protection from germs and outside damage, as well as help stretching during childbirth.
[POINT TO LABIA MAJORA AND LABIA MINORA] These are the labia majora, or outer lips, and labia minora, or inner lips. Their main purpose is to protect the vagina from damage, as well as aiding sexual excitation – they are very sensitive, with many nerves, and they also produce a liquid that lubricates during sexual intercourse, making it easier. [POINT TO CLITORIS] At the top, where the two sets of lips, the labia minora and labia majora, meet, there is a little pea-sized node called the clitoris. This little organ is one of the most misunderstood parts of the female body. Modern medical science proves that this is the only organ of its kind – small, densely packed with nerves, very complex, and built solely for the purpose of pleasure. The clitoris has over 8,000 sensory nerves whose sole purposes are to stimulate sexual pleasure. While this is a female organ, and it is largely meant for female sexual pleasure, it is vital for male enjoyment as well – the clitoris excites all of the other parts of the female genitalia, making it easier for the man to penetrate and enjoy sexual relations. [POINT TO PREPUCE] This is the prepuce, or the covering for the clitoris. It is formed by the meeting of the labia minora over the clitoris. Its purpose is to protect the clitoris from damage."

“When any of these parts are cut or damaged, it severely impairs a woman’s God-given right to enjoyment of marital sexual relations, which are necessary for a joyful family life. Damage to these parts often results in massive bleeding, infection (including HIV), lifelong pain, incontinence, and even death from all of these complications. Additionally, damage to these parts puts a mother at a serious risk of dying in childbirth, and makes her child far more likely to die as well. Therefore, if we want our community to be one of healthy and happy families, we must eliminate the practice of FGC.”

“Now, we are going to see examples of the three different main types of FGC used in our community, and in communities across of Nigeria, and how they harm the female genitalia.”

**Picture B: FGC Type I**

“This is a picture of the female genitalia when FGC Type I has been performed. FGC Type I is performed by cutting/damaging the prepuce, and then possibly damaging or removing the clitoris. As you can see in this picture, both the prepuce and the clitoris have been removed, and the labia majora may be sewn together to close off the top, forming scar tissue. In many cases, circumcisers attempt to remove only the prepuce, comparing the procedure to a male circumcision. Although the prepuce has similar nature to that of foreskin of the penis, its small size and attachment to the clitoris makes it difficult to remove without damaging the clitoris,"
unlike in male circumcision, where the foreskin can be removed without damaging the penis. Thus, it is nearly impossible, even for the most skilled circumcisers, to cut the prepuce without damaging the clitoris. A victim of FGC Type I will usually suffer from immense pain, massive bleeding, infection (including HIV), pain during sex, lack of sexual satisfaction, infertility, fistula (which means incontinence either of urine or feces), and problems in childbirth. One out of seven girls subjected to FGC Type I die as a result of the procedure, whether from infection or bleeding out during the process, or during childbirth.”

**Picture C: FGC Type II**

“In this picture, we see the genitalia of a girl or woman who has been subjected to FGC Type II. FGC Type II is performed by removing the clitoris with all or part of the labia minora. As we know from looking at the diagram of the healthy female genitalia, the labia minora (inner lips) have several important functions, including protecting the vagina from damage and germs and facilitating sexual intercourse (they are very sensitive and excitable, and produce a secretion that lubricates sexual intercourse, making it easier for penetration and more pleasurable for both parties). The victim of FGC Type II suffers from all the same effects as the victim of FGC Type I – except more severely. One out of three girls subjected to FGC Type II dies from complications of the procedure, whether from bleeding, infection, or in childbirth.”

**Picture D: FGC Type III**

“This picture shows the genitalia of a victim of FGC Type III, also known as ‘infibulation’. This is the worst type of FGC, and it is widely performed in the Afar, Somali, and Harari regions of Nigeria. In this type of FGC, all external sexual organs are removed, including the clitoris, labia minora (inner lips), and labia majora (outer lips). In addition, the remainder of the labia majora are sewn together, leaving only a small hole for urine and menstruation. The girl or woman subjected to FGC Type III is left this way until her wedding day, when her scar is ripped open for sexual intercourse – she is then repaired, making her opening only large enough for the husband to penetrate her. She is re-opened during childbirth, and this is often a very painful, bloody,
and fatal procedure. The victims of FGC Type III suffer from all the same effects as victims of the previous types of FGC, except to an even more severe degree, and with more of a risk for bleeding, shock, infection, and death in childbirth – their babies are far more likely to die as well. Research has shown that half of all girls who undergo FGC Type III die from complications directly related to the procedure, whether from bleeding, infection, or in childbirth.

“FGC is a good example of humans believing they are wiser than God, our creator. The damage of FGC is not limited to the just the mother, even. As mentioned throughout our lesson, 10-20% of infants born from mothers who have been subjected to FGC die because of complications directly related to her FGC – especially since FGC limits the elasticity of the vagina as a birth control. If a baby’s mother has had FGC, the baby may become stuck, suffocate, and die. While all misfortunes are not all our fault, this is something in our community that we can fix. FGC is bad for the entire community, and eliminating it will save lives.”

“Now, we are going to discuss some common myths that lead people to practice FGC, and explain why they are not true, using our newfound knowledge about the female anatomy.”

1) **MYTH:** ‘FGC removes the harmful, dirty, disgusting parts of the female genitalia.”

   **FACT:** The female genitalia do not have any ‘harmful,’ ‘dirty,’ or ‘disgusting parts’. The parts commonly cut during FGC in our region, the clitoris and the labia minora, have a very important function in sexual pleasure. A victim of FGC usually suffers from a lack of sexual satisfaction, if not excruciating pain, which in turn affects her husband’s sexual pleasure. A joyful marriage is based on mutual satisfaction, and FGC works against that.

2) **MYTH:** ‘Without FGC, the female parts will produce a foul smell, making the girl undesirable.’

   **FACT:** Starting at puberty, the time when a girl begins to mature physically into a woman, the vagina naturally produces a little bit of secretion. Unless cleaned on a daily basis, it might very well cause a bad smell. However, the same is true for men – unless a man cleans his genitalia on a daily basis, they may also produce a bad smell. Some communities believe that ‘clearing out’ the area through FGC is the solution. However, this logic is like saying all people should be scalped to prevent head lice. Therefore, the solution is not FGC, but being aware of personal hygiene, and cleaning ourselves every day.
Wrap Up

“In summary, FGC results in multiple short-term and long-term complications. Short term complications, during and immediately after the procedure, include excruciating pain, massive bleeding, and infection. 10% of all girls who are subjected to all types of FGC die from the procedure itself, whether from bleeding or infection shortly after. Long-term complications include psychological damage from such trauma to intimate, sensitive body parts, sexual complications, complications in childbirth, and lifelong pain. These complications lead to much discord between spouses, and within families. This kind of family instability leads to community instability, which leads to national instability in Nigeria.

Therefore, for the good of our communities and our nation, we must educate ourselves. We must dispel myths about practices like FGC by asking one question: Is this really good for our girls, our boys, and our families? Knowing all that we do now about the female anatomy, it is clear that FGC is incredibly harmful, not only to women and girls, but to everyone around them. It may be uncomfortable for us to talk about the human body the way we have just now, but these are honest discussions that need to happen, and will make our community healthier and happier.

“FGC is not pleasing to God. Our bodies are God's perfect creations, and knowledge about this is power!”
Myths, Facts, and the Reality of FGC
A Muslim Perspective

Speaking Guide

“I want to begin by thanking you all for being so willing to listen and discuss about a very important topic that affects all of us, whether we are men or women, boys or girls. We are going to learn about the female body, and the parts that Allah, our creator, has chosen to put there.

“Many of you may know about the practice of female genital cutting, or FGC. This is something that is done to girls and women in our community for many reasons. Some feel that cutting the female genitalia is a practice that is pleasing to Allah, and that it is required for a woman to be a good wife and mother. Others believe that the female genitalia will grow to the ground, or that they will produce worms and a foul smell if they are left uncut. Still others believe that a woman without FGC will be unable to have children, and that FGC is the only way a woman can live a happy, healthy life.

“What do all of these ideas have in common? They are false, and based on generations of myth and misunderstanding. FGC is a practice that has no health benefits for any girl or woman.

“I would like to ask you now: what have you heard about FGC in your life? What reasons have people used to justify it as a good practice?”

[OPEN UP TO GROUP FOR DISCUSSION, THEN COME BACK TO SPEAKING GUIDE]

One thing you all must know is that many of the reasons given to justify FGC are based on myths, not on truths. FGC does not make a woman more fertile, or able to have more children. In fact, FGC can often make a woman unable to have children. Many may think a girl needs FGC to keep her genitalia from growing to the ground. Still others believe that the female genitalia are “dirty” or “ugly” without FGC. Here are the facts: the female genitalia will not grow to the ground, nor are they “dirty” or “ugly” when left alone. FGC often leaves women and girls with a lifetime of unnecessary pain and suffering. Finally, FGC is not pleasing to Allah – in fact, it is quite the opposite, since FGC is like telling Allah, ‘Your creation is imperfect, let me correct it for you!’”

No Blame or Shame, Just Change!

“Even if we have promoted the practice of FGC ourselves, or had it done to us, we can stop the practice of FGC in our community right now. How? By educating ourselves about the real, medical facts behind FGC, learning more about our bodies and ourselves, and having open, honest discussions about how these things affect our daily lives. Eliminating practices like FGC can and will make our lives, and the lives of our children and all generations after, better and healthier.”
“Now, let’s begin by looking at some diagrams of the female anatomy, and see how a normal, healthy female genitalia compares to one that has been circumcised.”

[NOTE: THE FOUR SMALLER PICTURES BELOW EACH REFER TO THE CORRESPONDING INDIVIDUAL PICTURES ON THE LARGER FLIPCHART]

**Picture A: Uncircumcised (normal) female genitalia**

“This is a picture of the female genitalia, as viewed when a girl or woman is lying on her back, with her legs bent sideways. I understand that you may have never seen anything like this before, or you may be shocked and ask yourself, “why is this disgusting picture being shown to us?” To that, I answer that this is nothing to be considered disgusting. Allah created both men and women, and made their parts wonderfully complex. Therefore, Allah has made our bodies perfectly, so we should not be shocked by seeing diagrams of our own bodies, in their natural state, in His house of worship. According to Quran 96:4, “verily we created man of the best stature.” Additionally, we should not think that any part that Allah has created perfectly is ‘disgusting,’ or needs removal. Quran 30:30 says, ‘there is no changing Allah’s creation. And that is the proper religion but many people do not know.’”

“There are six main parts in the healthy, normal female genitalia: the clitoris, the prepuce, the labia minora, the labia majora, the urethral opening, and the vagina.”

[POINT TO URETHRAL OPENING] “This is the urethral opening. Many of you may confuse this with the vagina, since all fluids seem to come from the same opening in a woman’s body. However, the urethral
opening is very different from the vagina, in that its sole purpose is for ridding the body of toxins through urine. [POINT TO VAGINA] The vagina is the opening through which a woman delivers a baby, and experiences sexual intercourse. This opening is very complex and sensitive, and requires many layers of protection from germs and outside damage, as well as help stretching during childbirth. [POINT TO LABIA MAJORA AND LABIA MINORA] These are the labia majora, or outer lips, and labia minora, or inner lips. Their main purpose is to protect the vagina from damage, as well as aiding sexual excitation – they are very sensitive, with many nerves, and they also produce a liquid that lubricates sexual intercourse, making it easier.

[POINT TO CLITORIS] At the top, where the two sets of lips, the labia minora and labia majora, meet, there is a little pea-sized node called the clitoris. This little organ is one of the most misunderstood parts of the female body. Modern medical science proves that this is the only organ of its kind – small, densely packed with nerves, very complex, and built solely for the purpose of pleasure. The clitoris has over 8,000 sensory nerves whose sole purposes are to stimulate sexual pleasure. While this is a female organ, and it is largely meant for female sexual pleasure, it is vital for male enjoyment as well – the clitoris excites all of the other parts of the female genitalia, making it easier for the man to penetrate and enjoy sexual relations. [POINT TO PREPUCE] This is the prepuce, or the covering for the clitoris. It is formed by the meeting of the labia minora over the clitoris. Its purpose is to protect the clitoris from damage.

“When any of these parts are cut or damaged, it severely impairs a woman’s right to enjoyment of marital sexual relations, which are necessary for a joyful family life. Damage to these parts often results in massive bleeding, infection (including HIV), lifelong pain, incontinence, and even death from all of these complications. Additionally, damage to these parts puts a mother at a serious risk of dying in childbirth, and makes her child far more likely to die as well. Therefore, if we want our community to be one of healthy and happy families, we must eliminate the practice of FGC.

“Now, we are going to see examples of the three different main types of FGC used in our community, and in communities across of Nigeria, and how they harm the female genitalia.”
**Picture B: FGC Type I**

“This is a picture of the female genitalia when FGC Type I has been performed. FGC Type I is performed by cutting/damaging the prepuce, and then possibly damaging or removing the clitoris. As you can see in this picture, both the prepuce and the clitoris have been removed, and the labia majora may be sewn together to close off the top, forming scar tissue. In many cases, circumcisers attempt to remove only the prepuce, comparing the procedure to a male circumcision. Although the prepuce has similar nature to that of foreskin of the penis, its small size and attachment to the clitoris makes it difficult to remove without damaging the clitoris, unlike in male circumcision, where the foreskin can be removed without damaging the penis. Thus, it is nearly impossible, even for the most skilled circumcisers, to cut the prepuce without damaging the clitoris. A victim of FGC Type I will usually suffer from immense pain, massive bleeding, infection (including HIV), pain during sex, lack of sexual satisfaction, infertility, fistula (which means incontinence either of urine or feces), and problems in childbirth. One out of seven girls subjected to FGC Type I die as a result of the procedure, whether from infection or bleeding out during the process, or during childbirth.”

**Picture C: FGC Type II**

“In this picture, we see the genitalia of a girl or woman who has been subjected to FGC Type II. FGC Type II is performed by removing the clitoris with all or part of the labia minora. As we know from looking at the diagram of the healthy female genitalia, the labia minora (inner lips) have several important functions, including protecting the vagina from damage and germs and facilitating sexual intercourse (they are very sensitive and excitable, and produce a secretion that lubricates sexual intercourse, making it easier for penetration and more pleasurable for both parties). The victim of FGC Type II suffers from all the same effects as the victim of FGC Type I – except more severely. One out of three girls subjected to FGC Type II dies from complications of the procedure, whether from bleeding, infection, or in childbirth.”
Picture D: FGC Type III

“This picture shows the genitalia of a victim of FGC Type III, also known as ‘infibulation’. This is the worst type of FGC, and it is widely performed in the Afar, Somali, and Harari regions of Nigeria. In this type of FGC, all external sexual organs are removed, including the clitoris, labia minora (inner lips), and labia majora (outer lips). In addition, the remainder of the labia majora are sewn together, leaving only a small hole for urine and menstruation. The girl or woman subjected to FGC Type III is left this way until her wedding day, when her scar is ripped open for sexual intercourse – she is then repaired, making her opening only large enough for the husband to penetrate her. She is re-opened during childbirth, and this is often a very painful, bloody, and fatal procedure. The victims of FGC Type III suffer from all the same effects as victims of the previous types of FGC, except to an even more severe degree, and with more of a risk for bleeding, shock, infection, and death in childbirth – their babies are far more likely to die as well. Research has shown that half of all girls who undergo FGC Type III die from complications directly related to the procedure, whether from bleeding, infection, or in childbirth.

“FGC is a good example of humans believing they are wiser than Allah, our creator. The damage of FGC is not limited to just the mother, even. As mentioned throughout our lesson, 10-20% of infants born from mothers who have been subjected to FGC die because of complications directly related to her FGC – especially since FGC limits the elasticity of the vagina as a birth control. If a baby’s mother has had FGC, the baby may become stuck, suffocate, and die. While all misfortunes are not all our fault, this is something in our community that we can fix. FGC is bad for the entire community, and eliminating it will save lives.

“Now, we are going to discuss some common myths that lead people to practice FGC, and explain why they are not true, using our newfound knowledge about the female anatomy.”

1) **MYTH:** ‘FGC removes the harmful, dirty, disgusting parts of the female genitalia.”

**FACT:** The female genitalia do not have any ‘harmful,’ ‘dirty,’ or ‘disgusting parts’. The parts commonly cut during FGC in our region, the clitoris and the labia minora, have a very important function in sexual pleasure. A victim of FGC usually suffers from a lack of sexual satisfaction, if not excruciating pain, which in turn affects her husband’s sexual pleasure. A joyful marriage is based on mutual satisfaction, and FGC works against that.
2) **MYTH:** ‘Without FGC, the female parts will produce a foul smell, making the girl undesirable.’

**FACT:** Starting at puberty, the time when a girl begins to mature physically into a woman, the vagina naturally produces a little bit of secretion. Unless cleaned on a daily basis, it might very well cause a bad smell. However, the same is true for men – unless a man cleans his genitalia on a daily basis, they may also produce a bad smell. Some communities believe that ‘clearing out’ the area through FGC is the solution. However, this logic is like saying all people should be scalped to prevent head lice. Therefore, the solution is not FGC, but being aware of personal hygiene, and cleaning ourselves every day.

**Conclusion**

“In summary, FGC results in multiple short-term and long-term complications. Short term complications, during and immediately after the procedure, include excruciating pain, massive bleeding, and infection. 10% of all girls who are subjected to all types of FGC die from the procedure itself, whether from bleeding or infection shortly after. Long term complications include psychological damage from such trauma to intimate, sensitive body parts, sexual complications, complications in childbirth, and lifelong pain. These complications lead to much discord between spouses, and within families. This kind of family instability leads to community instability, which leads to national instability in Nigeria.

Therefore, for the good of our communities and our nation, we must educate ourselves. We must dispel myths about practices like FGC by asking one question: Is this really good for our girls, our boys, and our families? Knowing all that we do now about the female anatomy, it is clear that FGC is incredibly harmful, not only to women and girls, but to everyone around them. It may be uncomfortable for us to talk about the human body the way we have just now, but these are honest discussions that need to happen, and will make our community healthier and happier.

FGC is not pleasing to Allah. Our bodies are Allah’s perfect creations, and knowledge about this is power!
Begin the Conversation:
Four Conversations That Healthy Communities Should Have about FGC.

Faith leaders touch the lives of their communities in many ways: at weekly prayers, during lifecycle events, during individual counseling, or out in the community. Each of these interactions can be a teachable moment – an opportunity to discuss health and well-being with your community and share important messages. Here are four key conversations that all faith leaders – regardless of faith – can have with their community:

Introduction
Congratulations, and thank you for your willingness to empower girls in your community through the eradication of harmful traditional practices! FGC, though devastating to a girl’s health, well-being, and future, continues to be practiced in many communities, and viewed as good and necessary. Therefore, it may seem a daunting task to change the minds of your community members about these harmful practices. However, educating yourself and continuing to brush up on your newly acquired knowledge about FGC will help you pave the way for real and sustainable change in your area.

These conversation starters are a good first step to engaging your community in a conversation about the practice of FGC. They are meant to provide talking points and key messages to convey to your congregation and community about these practices. Each talking point/key message comes with appropriate theological/scriptural references to back them up.

There are many ways to use these conversation starters – it’s up to you. No matter how you choose to use them, though, be sure to study them carefully before you begin talking to your community about FGC – and continue to use them as a resource for yourself, as needed.

Instructions
Read through these conversation starters, and then, further below, the theological/scriptural references around each talking point/key message. Reflect on them, and absorb the information. If you find anything you disagree with, take this as an opportunity to educate yourself further. These theological/scriptural references have been tested and approved by both Christian and Muslim faith leaders.
When you feel ready, and adequately prepared to speak about FGC using these talking points/key messages and their scriptural references, you can begin engaging your community in a discussion about these issues. There are several ways you can do this:

- If you make frequent home visits to your community members, use them to help you structure conversations about these topics. These conversations can be as long or as short as you like – you don't need to get to every talking point/key message! Just one per conversation can be enough, since everyone will likely have a lot to say.
- If you lead a men’s or women’s group, use them as a way to informally get them thinking about the realities of FGC for their daughters. It is best to begin by engaging a small, trusted group you know will listen and discuss issues with each other respectfully.
- If you feel comfortable enough, you can use these conversation starters to address larger groups of adults or youth in your community.

Again, how you use these conversation starters is up to you. Once you have educated yourself, and feel prepared, you can use your own experience and style to be creative!

Eliminating FGC: All Human Life Has Dignity

- **Conversation 1:** Are our bodies the creations of God/Allah, the perfect creator? If so, does female genital cutting reduce the dignity of human life?

- **Conversation 2:** As medical facts have proven that FGC is not good for women, why not stop cutting out a healthy, beautiful, perfectly functioning body part?

- **Conversation 3:** FGC is harmful, but is still used as an attempt to “guarantee” virginity in girls. Does FGC punish the innocent before a crime is even committed?

- **Conversation 4:** How can responsible, healthy, and productive communities work to eliminate harmful practices like FGC?

Please refer to Module 2 (above) for scriptural elements that may support you, your congregation and your community in your conversations on these topics. Module 2 includes specific references from the Bible, Quran, and other religious sources so that you can tailor these conversations to your specific faith community.
Begin the Conversation: Four Conversations That Healthy Communities Should Have about FGC.

Begin the Conversation: What’s the Big Idea?
Faith leaders touch the lives of their communities in many ways: at weekly prayers, during major life events, during individual counseling, or out in the community. Each of these interactions can be a teachable moment – an opportunity for you to discuss health and well being with your community and share important messages.

‘Start the Conversation’ outlines 4 key conversations that you can have with your community.

How Do I “Begin the Conversation”?
It’s not about waiting for the perfect moment or having all the answers…it’s about offering you opportunities to encourage others. Those opportunities might be during a meeting of your women’s group, during a sermon, during pre-marital counseling, during a holiday celebration, or another appropriate moment where you can start a conversation about these issues.

Sometimes it can be hard to have conversations about HIV/AIDS…don’t worry. When we talk about HIV or risk reduction, we are really talking about what we can all do to create healthy and strong communities – and that’s a goal that all religious communities share. Remember, these are suggested ‘conversations,’ not lessons. You can just ask the question and support your community as they engage with these issues. However, if you are reading this toolkit, chances are you have a lot to contribute!

OK, enough chit-chat. Let’s start the conversation. Conversation One begins on the next page…
Begin the Conversation on Eliminating FGC  
– “All Human Life has Dignity”

Conversation One: Are our bodies the creations of God/Allah, the perfect creator? If so, does female genital cutting reduce the dignity of human life?

The BIG ideas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All human life has dignity.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• We are perfect creations of the perfect creator. “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful” (Psalm 139:14).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. FGC, or the removal of a beautiful, healthy, functioning body part, is calling ugly/offensive what God has made clean. “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” (Acts 10:15).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All human life has dignity.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• We are all perfect creations of Allah, the perfect creator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cutting or harming a body part that we were born with when there is nothing wrong with it, as happens in FGC, goes against Allah’s wishes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “…and there is no changing Allah’s creation. And that is the proper religion but many people do not know” (Quran 30:30).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “…and make not your own hands contribute to your destruction” (Quran 2:195).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Facts

- FGC can cause infection, whether from the procedure itself or complications afterwards.
- FGC can cause obstetric fistula, a condition causing incontinence of urine or feces, and many other damaging physical and mental issues for the woman affected.
- FGC makes marital relations and childbirth/delivery extremely painful, due to an excess of scar tissue and an obstructed vaginal opening.
- FGC can cause infant and maternal mortality, due to the obstructed vaginal opening.
- FGC is not healthy circumcision; it is instead like to removing the entire male member.

Some Quick Tips

- Look for opportunities to begin talking to your community about issues of health and wellness. We want to make sure that people walk away with a sense of personal and communal responsibility for their health and well-being as well as the knowledge that they have the power to control their health.
- Address the Key Facts referred to above. If people have misconceptions about FGC, it’s important to correct those (see below for additional resources to help you do that).

Additional Resources:
For more basic information and Key Facts about FGC, see Module 2: “Teach Yourself”. For more help on how to talk about FGC or have difficult conversations, see ‘Some Common Questions’ in Module 1: “Get Started”.
Begin the Conversation on Eliminating FGC – “All Human Life has Dignity”

Conversation Two: As medical facts have proven that FGC is not good for women, why not stop cutting out a healthy, beautiful, perfectly functioning body part?

The BIG ideas:

God’s creation is perfect.

- After creating both man and woman, “God saw all that he had made, and (said) it was very good” (Genesis 1:31).
- FGC, when used to ensure virginity before marriage and fidelity after marriage, is punishing the innocent before a sin was even committed – this type of injustice towards the innocent deeply hurts God.
  
  i. In fact, God never intended for us to consider any part of our bodies shameful or ugly: “Adam and his wife were both naked, and felt no shame” (Genesis 2:25). It was only after the fall of Adam and Eve, when they were tempted by Satan, that they covered their bodies out of shame. “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves” (Genesis 3:7). This is not to say that we should go around naked in our daily lives, but to show that God never originally created humans with offensive, shameful parts that need removal. After the fall, still under the influence of evil, they concluded that sexual/reproductive organs are shameful. Still, however, God did not say that these parts need to be removed. Believing that these parts are so disgusting and dangerous that they require removal is a further corruption.

- FGC is neither beneficial to health family life nor is it a healthy covenant with God; instead, it is an insult to God through an act of violence and humiliation toward innocent women and girls. The Old Testament signs of covenant included MALE-ONLY circumcision. Genesis 12: 2-3: “Every male among you shall be circumcised.” In these days, it was a sign of closeness with God, something that set them apart from the nonbelievers.
However, 1st Corinthians 7:19, St. Paul said, “Circumcision is nothing and un-circumcision is nothing.” As the Word of God (the Bible) does not contradict itself, the above verses mean that male circumcision was a sign of covenant during the Old Testament times, but in the New Testament circumcision does not have any religious significance. It is only a health measure, which does not affect the male penis in the same way it affects the female clitoris/other parts.

FGC is not the same as male circumcision. Medically speaking, the glans clitoris is equivalent to the head of the penis – to cut either off is a gross affront to human dignity, as it deprives victims of the potential joy found in healthy marital relations.

Allah’s creation is perfect.
- “Verily we created man of the best stature” (Quran: 96:4).
  i. The beauty of a human body is to be left as it was created by Allah, unless there is an authentic basis allowing interference with it. Authentic bases include medical indications and the clearly stated male circumcision. Conversely, FGC could be seen as an insult to Allah that is an issue to repent/confess for saying (in action): your creation is imperfect, let me correct it for you! Of course, the underpinning argument is that Allah has created women abnormally, and that we need to take corrective measures. Current medical science, however, agrees with perfect creation.
  ii. FGC is not a healthy form of circumcision or covenant with Allah, as with male circumcision.
  iii. It is instead an insult to Allah through an act of violence and humiliation on innocent people.
  iv. It is not equivalent to male circumcision – in fact, it is akin to removing the entire male member.
  v. “Oh you messenger [Muhammad] proclaim [the message] which has been sent down to you from your Lord. And if you do not then you have not conveyed His message” (Quran: 5: 67).
  vi. If FGC was a religious requirement, the Prophet would have explicitly taught it, and his wives and daughters would have been circumcised. The Prophet taught about correct Islamic behavior in all aspects of life, including toilet manners, table manners, relations between husband and wife, and so on. It is not logical, therefore, that he would be silent on a matter that affects an important human reproductive organ.
  vii. Kindness means never inflicting harm unless necessary – and even then, mercy is far more admirable.
Key Facts

- FGC can cause infection, whether from the procedure itself or complications afterwards.
- FGC can cause obstetric fistula, a condition causing incontinence of urine or feces, and many other damaging physical and mental issues for the woman affected.
- FGC makes marital relations and childbirth/delivery extremely painful, due to an excess of scar tissue and an obstructed vaginal opening.
- FGC can cause infant and maternal mortality, due to the obstructed vaginal opening.

Some Quick Tips

- Stress the fact that all people can play a role in reducing your community’s practice of FGC, and thus play a key role in promoting the health and wellbeing of girls and women. Whether it is telling people about the harmfulness of FGC, supporting family members who decide NOT to practice FGC, or choosing not to inflict FGC on our daughters, there are many things that we can each do to help create a healthy community.
- Make sure that during this conversation your community begins to really understand the basic facts about FGC, as these will be built-upon in subsequent conversations.

Additional Resources:

For more basic information and Key Facts about FGC, see Module 2: “Teach Yourself. For more help on how to talk about FGC or have difficult conversations, see ‘Some Common Questions’ in Module 1: “Get Started.”
Begin the Conversation on Eliminating FGC –
“All Human Life has Dignity”

Conversation Three: FGC is harmful, but used anyway in an attempt to “guarantee” virginity in girls. Does FGC punish the innocent before a crime is even committed?

The BIG ideas:

Both boys and girls should be treated with love and respect

- In John 13:34-35, Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” This means that we should love both boys and girls in our families equally, and not value one above the other. Practices like FGC and early marriage imply that we value boys above girls; this is not how God wants us to treat each other.

- Quran 60:8 “Allah loves the equitable.”
  i. We are all fellow human beings, not one physically inferior to the other: "Assuredly, women are the twin halves of men." (Sahih reported by Abu-Dawud (RA) This is physically, factually true – cutting of the clitoris is equivalent to the cutting off of the entire male penis. We are physically wired very similarly, just constructed differently! Allah wants us to act according to the truth, and FGC is not in line with this Quranic ideal. In other words, gender inequality is not Islamic.

- Acts such as FGC punish the innocent in the absence of a crime—which is an injustice before Allah. The Prophet did not recommend it for any of the women in his house, nor did he approve of the practice when he saw it being done.
  i. Hadith of Ummu-Attiya: This is the Hadith most commonly used to link FGC to Islam. The Hadith relates that the Prophet said to a woman of Medina, a circumciser called Ummu-Attiyah, "O Umm `Attiyah, `ashimmi’ and do not exaggerate; as doing so will preserve the fairness of the woman’s face and satisfy the husband.” As one Islamic scholar noted, one line of this hadith attempts to express the reaction of the Prophet to the screaming of the girl being circumcised. “The Prophet held his head and shared her agony” for a while—meaning he disagreed with this pre-Islamic, harmful traditional practice. Cognizant of the
ii. A contextual interpretation of the Hadith, other scholars believe that during that time, the Prophet was not authoritative enough to strongly denounce such widely tolerated traditional practice.

- **Quran 4:124** “But the believers who do good works, both men and women, shall enter paradise.”
  i. Men and women are equal in the sight of Allah.
  ii. FGC is a practice that can harm a girl for the rest of her life – affecting her ability to enjoy a relationship with her husband, and often making childbirth complicated and unbearable.

### Key Facts

- Female Genital Cutting (FGC) is illegal in our country.
- FGC is not healthy circumcision; it is instead like removing the entire male member.

### Some Quick Tips

- Know that FGC has never been shown to have ANY beneficial effects whatsoever; on the contrary, all studies on the subject show the many detrimental effects of FGC.
- Make the conversation easier by talking about what a healthy marriage and a healthy family looks like and how one way to support one another is making sure that everyone in the family stays healthy. Eliminating FGC is one way to do that.

### Additional Resources:

For more basic information and **Key Facts** about FGC, see **Module 2**: “Teach Yourself”. For more help on how to talk about FGC or have difficult conversations, see ‘Some Common Questions’ in **Module 1**: “Get Started.”
Begin the Conversation on Eliminating FGC – “All Human Life has Dignity”

Conversation Four: How can responsible, healthy, and productive communities work to eliminate harmful practices like FGC?

The BIG ideas:

Knowledgeable, responsible, happy, healthy, and productive communities work to eliminate harmful practices like FGC.

• The proven harms of FGC are great, and there are no actual benefits.
  i. FGC can cause obstetric fistula, a condition causing incontinence of urine or feces, and many other damaging physical and mental issues for the woman affected, including infertility.
  ii. FGC can cause infections, whether during the procedure or afterwards.
  iii. FGC has life-long consequences, and can even cause death.
  iv. FGC does NOT eliminate sexual desire.

• We do not cut off our hands so that we might not steal, for the desire/command to steal comes from the brain and not from the hand.
  i. Indeed, according to Matthew 5:27-28, sexual sin, or adultery, includes lustful looks and thoughts - which are not removed by cutting the genitalia: “You have heard it said, you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that everyone who looks at another with lustful intent has already committed adultery in their hearts.” Therefore, cutting the genitalia to prevent sexual immorality does useless, irreversible harm and no good.
  ii. God commands us not to punish the innocent, but instead to protect them. “Help the weak” (Thessalonians 5:23). Young girls cannot defend themselves properly when others want to harm a part of their body – but we can be a voice for the voiceless by ending the practice in our communities.

The practice of FGC does not just hurt one girl; it hurts the entire community, and robs it of its dignity.
Knowledgeable, responsible, happy, healthy, and productive communities work to eliminate harmful practices like FGC.

- The harms of FGC outweigh the benefits.
  - i. FGC can cause infertility.
  - ii. FGC can cause infections, whether during the procedure or afterwards.
  - iii. FGC has lifelong health consequences, and can lead to death.

- “And if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he/she has saved the life of the whole people” (Quran 5:32).
  - i. There is no question that stopping the practice of FGC saves and greatly improves lives. True heroes in the community are those who combat harmful and deadly practices like FGC.
  - ii. Halting unnecessarily cruel practices like FGC can improve the lives of the whole community – girls who are healthier are happier, and enter into marriages better-prepared to enjoy a good relationship with their husbands.

- It was Iblis (Satan) who said, “Verily I will mislead them and surely arouse in them false desires and I will order them to slit the ears of cattle and indeed I will order them to change the nature created by Allah…” (Quran: 4: 119).
  - i. According to the Quran, any act that amounts to changing Allah’s creation is considered the work of Satan.

- “Allah changes not the condition of a people until they change that which is in their hearts…” (Quran 13:11).
  - i. We cannot make great changes in our communities until we change our thoughts and feelings towards all humans – this means recognizing the full humanity of and showing compassion towards girls and women, as with all people.
  - ii. The practice of FGC does not just hurt one girl; it hurts the entire community, and robs it of its full potential.
Key Facts

- Female Genital Cutting (FGC) is illegal in our country.
- FGC can cause infection, whether from the procedure itself or complications afterwards.
- FGC can cause obstetric fistula, a condition causing incontinence of urine or feces, and many other damaging physical and mental issues for the woman affected.
- FGC makes marital relations and childbirth/delivery extremely painful, due to an excess of scar tissue and an obstructed vaginal opening.
- FGC can cause infant and maternal mortality, due to the obstructed vaginal opening.
- FGC is not healthy circumcision; it is instead like removing the entire male member.

Some Quick Tips

- Recognize that our decisions do not just affect us – they affect our families, loved ones, and all those around us.
- Help your community to understand that this means: FGC similarly does not just affect us. If a daughter or mother dies in childbirth due to FGC, or is shunned due to a fistula, they are less able to work and support our families. We have a responsibility to protect ourselves and those around us.

Additional Resources:
For more basic information and Key Facts about FGC, see Module 2: “Teach Yourself”. For more help on how to talk about FGC or have difficult conversations, see ‘Some Common Questions’ in Module 1: “Get Started.”
Engage Women: “All Human Life Has Dignity”

These interactive workshops provide an opportunity for women to learn about Female Genital Cutting, understand how they might use it, and discuss the specific issues that confront women. These workshops can be implemented in any women’s only setting – whether you have a longstanding women’s group within your faith community or if this is the first time that a group of women are coming together. The workshops can be facilitated by any capable person you trust who has a good grounding in these materials. They might be a faith leader, lay leader, women’s group leader, or other caring member of the community. Keep in mind that depending on the region you work, it might be best to choose a woman to act as facilitator, or if that is not possible, as a co-facilitator. The module is structured around several workshops, whose topics are as follows:

- **Before you begin:** create a [Safe Space](#) for the participants
- **[Workshop 1: FGC: The Facts.](#)**
  - The purpose of this workshop is to acclimate participants to the idea of discussing FGC, and to introduce the key medical facts about FGC. This workshop can be used as a stand-alone workshop, or as a “warm-up” immediately preceding Workshop 2.

- **[Workshop 2: Stop female genital cutting: it reduces the dignity of human life.](#)** We are perfect creations of God/Allah, the perfect creator.
  - The purpose of this workshop is to emphasize how FGC hurts not only women, but entire communities, and is a violation of God/Allah’s perfect creation. The end goal of this workshop should be to encourage these women to speak to their families and fellow community members on the topic, because happy, healthy, and productive communities work together to eliminate harmful practices like FGC.

These modules can be introduced either as part of a workshop series, or as stand-alone workshops themselves. Each contains a sample workshop plan and a series of conversations or activities that you can use.

However, you don’t just need to stick to the sample workshop plans; change or adapt these in order to best suit your needs. Use the activities that work best for you and feel free to add your own elements as well. It’s important to try and include the ‘Key Facts’ and ‘Big Ideas’ in your workshops, but there’s no reason not to get creative.
Introduction
This women’s group module is designed to engage a group of women in a conversation about female genital cutting (FGC). The session should be facilitated by a faith leader, an elder, or any other member of the community who would normally be responsible for leading the regular women’s group sessions.

FGC is a practice that can have devastating effects on the lives of women and girls. FGC can seriously impair a girl’s health, and these effects will only worsen as she grows to be a woman. Health problems caused by FGC include: shock, bleeding, infection from unsterile blades (including HIV), painful scarring, fistula (incontinence of urine/feces) and continued pain/trauma which can affect marital relations, and will definitely obstruct childbirth, endangering both mother and child.

Many of the women in your women’s group may have been affected by FGC. Therefore, you must be sensitive to their experience when engaging them in conversations about this topic. Many have been led to believe that this was the best thing that could have been done for them, and continue to perpetuate these practices with their own daughters for the same reasons. In order for this women’s group activity to work, you or the facilitator must make sure the women feel like they have a safe space where they can talk about their own experiences honestly.

Instructions
This Women’s Group Module contains different lessons/group activities to engage women in a conversation about FGC. They should ideally be used in a group of 12 women or less, and be facilitated by a faith leader, or a trusted, educated lay leader, male or female.

Read through each lesson/group activity carefully, and make sure you do not have any questions about the content before you proceed. If you do, please take this as an opportunity to seek more information from a trusted source, such as a local health clinic.

Please use the instructions provided in each lesson/group activity, and always allow women the opportunity to speak up or ask questions if they wish to do so.

NOTE: If you can, try to get to know a bit about each of the women in your group, so you may ask the appropriate discussion questions. Please refer to the discussion questions in the lesson/group activity for the questions to ask married women, married women with sons, married women with daughters, and unmarried women.
Start your first women’s group session with a very brief introduction.

“I’ve invited you here to participate in this women’s workshop so that we can feel more comfortable discussing female genital cutting (FGC), and other harmful traditional practices that hurt women. Let’s start with an interactive exercise that helps us create a space in which we feel safe to have conversations about these difficult topics.”
Engage Women: All Human Life has Dignity

Activity
Creating a Safe Space – Before You Begin

Suggested Time: 15 minutes

Before you begin your first workshop with a group, it is important to establish what is called “safe space.” Safe space doesn’t just happen – it’s up to you to take a proactive role in creating an atmosphere that will best support the growth and learning of each participant. Here’s a quick activity that will help establish safe space:

1) Explain to participants that the workshop(s) they’ll be taking part in are not just about you giving them information, but rather about people supporting each other to discuss difficult issues and learn from one another. Say that in order to do this effectively, we need to have a space in which each person feels comfortable and safe.

2) Ask the group, “How can we support each other to create a safe space?” or “What do you need in order to feel fully comfortable in this group?” Write the various answers that you hear on a large piece of paper or on a chalkboard so that everyone can see them.

3) Once you have received answers from as many women as would like to contribute, read everything that is written on the paper aloud, and ask the group if they think anything should be added. If not, ask the group if they are willing to commit to upholding what is written as group standards for the workshop.

4) Have participants signify their commitments by writing their names, initials, or drawing a marking or symbol on the sheet of paper with the safe space agreement.

It doesn’t have to end there! You can always come back to your safe space agreement. If your group ever meets again, you can remind people of their commitments at subsequent sessions. Additionally, if there is ever a difficult conversation or tension in the group, you can remind people of their safe space agreement and hold people to the intentions and norms that they set.

KEY TERM:
SAFE SPACE refers to a cooperative learning environment in which all participants feel comfortable and safe to fully participate. A safe space is one in which every person respects the ideas and thoughts of each other and people are supportive of each other’s growth and learning.
Engage Women: All Human Life Has Dignity

Introduction to Female Genital Cutting (FGC)

Materials needed: Female anatomy flipchart, chalkboard or flipchart, pens and papers.

Speaking Guide

“We are here to understand your views and to learn from you your thoughts and feelings pertaining to some specific topics that may have touched your lives or the lives of women around you. Today’s session will focus on something you may call female circumcision, which is also known as Female Genital Cutting, or FGC.”

“Please feel free to speak up and/or ask questions, but also to participate in the activities that we suggest.”

Workshop 1

FGC/NO FGC illustration

Show the group the faith-appropriate illustration. Ask the group to describe the illustrations. What is happening on each side? Start with the 1st illustration (on the left), and then move on to the 2nd one (on the right). Then, state that the illustration on the right is how all births should be, but ask: Are they? Ask the group to volunteer any stories about their childbirth experiences, or women they know who have had difficult births. Then introduce the second illustration and say there are many things that can complicate a natural birth process, and FGC is a major contributor.

Once you have discussed the illustrations with the group, show them the version with the words “FGC” and “NO FGC”.

Religions for Peace
Ask the group again, “what do you think may have happened in each picture now?”
Take answers, discuss, and then review the Key Facts about FGC.

Once you have discussed the illustrations with the group, show them the version with the words “FGC” and “NO FGC”.

Ask the group again, “what do you think may have happened in each picture now?”
Take answers, discuss, and then review the Key Facts about FGC

---

**Key Facts about FGC: A Basic Information Sheet**

1) Female Genital Cutting (FGC) is illegal in our country.

2) FGC can cause infection, whether from the procedure itself or complications afterwards.

3) FGC can cause obstetric fistula, a condition causing incontinence of urine or feces, and many other damaging physical and mental issues for the woman affected.

4) FGC makes marital relations and childbirth/delivery extremely painful, due to an excess of scar tissue and an obstructed vaginal opening.

5) FGC can cause infant and maternal mortality, due to the obstructed vaginal opening.

6) FGC is not healthy circumcision; it is instead like removing the entire male member.

If scriptural questions emerge, you will find Christian and Muslim FAQs and religious references in Module 2: “Teach Yourself”. 
Workshop 2
Topic: The dignity of all human life: God’s/Allah’s perfect creation

Initial icebreaker: “Things in Common.”

5) Have all participants stand in the center of the room/outdoor area. Stand in a corner or the room (or designated ‘corner’ if outdoors), and begin the game by calling out things that may be true about many of the women in your group, e.g., “I enjoy [particular kind of local food]” “I am married!” “I have brown eyes!” “I have brothers and sisters!” Anyone who agrees or thinks that statement applies to them must stand in the same corner. Anyone who disagrees or thinks that the statement does not apply to them must go stand in the opposite corner.

6) Once it has been established who has been in what corner, call out a new statement. You can get more and more specific, e.g., “I know how to do [regional dance]” “I am afraid of snakes!” “I have lived in the same house all my life!” If the participants are comfortable enough to do so, have them call out the statements/things in common and walk over to the designated corners. Do this for 5 minutes or so, or until everyone is sufficiently warmed up/comfortable talking/standing/moving around with each other.

7) Finally, call out “I have been circumcised/undergone FGC.” (This only works if the facilitator is a woman). Then, sit down with everyone and discuss what they thought about the game, what they learned about each other. There should be common threads. Ask what they thought of being asked if they had undergone FGC, and what they thought about it. If all in the room have had it done, ask them to think about what the experience meant to them throughout the group study.

For all women: What did it mean for them to undergo FGC? How do they feel about their circumcised/uncircumcised status?

For married women with sons: Ask them how their sons view girls in their community. What have you done to teach them about kindness to all and the things we all have in common as human beings under God/Allah?

For married women with daughters: Ask them how their daughters view themselves in their relation to boys. Do they see themselves as unclean or inferior? Have they had FGC performed on their daughters? If so, why? If not, what are the challenges they face, and how do they resist the social pressure to do so?
For married women with no children: Ask them if they hope to have daughters or sons more. If they have daughters, will they circumcise them? Why or why not?

For unmarried women: Ask them if they believe that FGC affects whether or not they will be able to marry. Why or why not?

**ACTIVITY:** Read the following story, then pause where indicated to ask questions of the group.

Once upon a time, there was a faraway land, where there lived a proud people of great cultural heritage, enriched by deep-rooted and much-treasured traditions. It was tradition, for instance, that the women in several of the villages in this land were one-legged. But one-legged as they might be, a more elegant and self-possessed group of women can hardly be imagined.

They had charming ways, and an extraordinary gift for beautiful poetry. At the same time, they were not without ambitions, and they possessed just the right measure of astuteness necessary to achieve them. And when the occasion demanded it, they could be very aggressive.

One day, a wise old woman from another area who was traveling through this land decided to stop and visit one of these villages; she had heard many great things about their people and their culture, and wanted to see them for herself. However, when she arrived, she saw that the people in this village were hungry and suffering – there had been a very bad drought throughout the land. The old woman was deeply saddened to see so much suffering in what was considered a great and vibrant community. The old woman was further shocked when she spoke to the women in this village. They considered it not only normal, but fashionable to walk on one leg! The wise old woman set about trying to discover the reasons for the strange phenomenon of the one-legged women, because she felt like cutting one leg of every woman could only increase the suffering of the village in such hard times.

This, however, was no easy task. The people she asked gave somewhat confusing answers as to why the women were unable to keep their two legs. Some people told her that if one of the legs of a little girl was not cut off, it would grow and grow, and before you knew where you were, it would become as big as a tree! Others told her that a woman with both legs was unable to bear a child. Yet others explained that a woman needed protection from herself, and somehow having one leg cut off helped to

---

ensure this. The old woman asked, “In what way?” But she did not receive a satisfactory answer. However, when she persisted with her question, she was told that with two legs a woman would run away and become a prostitute, but with one she would have difficulty!

Some people turned to the religious texts for an answer to the wise old woman’s question, and they convinced themselves that it was God/Allah who had decreed that women would behave better with just one leg. But there was one very old woman in the village who could remember how this habit of cutting one leg off every little girl had started. And she told the visiting wise old woman the following story:

“A long time ago,” said the old village woman, “in fact three thousand years ago, this land was enjoying a period of plenty and there were great festivities. Each year, colorful, exotic dance festivals were held to select the person who would be Ruler of the Land. In those days men and women competed equally and the best dancer would be crowned the Ruler of the Land. For five successive years, one man had won all the competitions hands down. But in the sixth year, it seemed that the throne was going to be snatched away from him. A beautiful woman had appeared on the scene, and it was clear that she could dance far better than this man.”

“He got very worried,” the old woman continued,” and decided something had to be done! In desperation, he passed a decree that all women should have one leg cut off. This seemed to solve his problem, for they, of course, could not dance successfully on one leg and the women were put out of the competition. That is how this man continued his reign for another 20 years.”

This, then, was the old village woman’s recollection of how the phenomenon of the one-legged women began. But to generations of people in this village, it was simply tradition, handed down by their ancestors. What is more, it had become the responsibility of women themselves to see to it that all girl children adhered to this tradition!

The visiting wise old woman was fascinated by this story. But she wanted to know whether the old village woman thought it was a good practice. The old village woman stood pondering for a while, and then she replied: “I have known of many traditions, some good, some bad – as for this one, I am not sure.”

Then the visiting wise old woman remarked: “But just from looking at you, I thought you felt comfortable.”
“Oh no,” said the old village woman. “We have so many difficulties carrying out our daily chores with one leg! But when it was decreed by the ruler three thousand years ago, everybody was frightened, and dared not discuss the issue. They all put on a brave face and professed it to be a wonderful tradition! Some said you could only be beautiful with one leg! Some said you could only be clean with one leg! Many claimed a woman could only be pure with one leg! And after a while, some women would say: ‘Why should we let the young women off the hook? We have suffered so much being one-legged. Now it is time for young girls to play their part in keeping the tradition going.’”

By this time, the visiting wise old woman was curious to know what the men had to say about all this. Was it possible that fathers would be blindly following such a tradition? Surely not! But the truth, she discovered, was that men could not afford to disapprove of tradition – even bad tradition. They believed that it would destroy family honor and dignity, and affect their status in the community. “After all,” they argued, “who would pay a good bride price for a daughter with two legs?”

Then the wise old woman asked, “But what about the children?” She could imagine them screaming with fear and pain. Yes, she was told, children would always be children. There were those who screamed and shouted and had to be forced to have the operation for their own good. Most of them, though, wanted to be like their friends and part of the crowd.

Then, the wise old woman thought that perhaps the rulers and lawmakers in this land might take a lead in stopping this bad tradition. But alas even they were not prepared to do so! They were afraid of challenging such a deep-rooted tradition.

Meanwhile, the food situation in this drought-stricken land was getting worse and worse. Walking on crutches, the women found it difficult to work the land and to travel far and wide to find richer pastures and foliage for the animals. But as the situation became worse, the wise old woman noticed that the people in this village were beginning to question cutting off a woman’s leg. A few men and women were coming together to discuss what they could do to stop this harmful tradition. They had realized the time had come to challenge it, if future generations were to survive these hard times.

As they talked among themselves, they discovered a multitude of myths surrounding the tradition. And as time went on, they gathered strength to challenge the myths and began to plan.
FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE: You may be thinking to yourselves, “This is an odd place to end the story, what happens?” Well, we are going to come up with our own ending to this story. Let’s ask ourselves, what are some of the possible ways this could turn out for the suffering village? Will getting rid of the one-leg tradition help this village get back on its feet? How might the people of this village challenge the tradition, and keep young girls from having their legs cut off in the future? 
(Allow 10-15 minutes for discussion).

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE: Thank you for all of your great ideas. The reason I read you this story is that this is our story. If any of us have undergone FGC, we are the one-legged women. However, there is hope, and there is hope for our daughters.

Ask the following discussion questions (FOR WOMEN'S GROUPS):

For all women: Ask what they thought of the story. Do they see the connection between the story and FGC? How they think it reflects their own experience?

For married women with sons: Ask them how they feel about tradition. Do they talk to their sons about the teachings of the Church and the traditions in their community? Do they explain that there is a difference?

For married women with daughters: Ask them how they feel about tradition. Do they talk to their daughters about the teachings of the Church and the traditions in their community? Do they explain that there is a difference?

For married women without children: Ask them if they felt that FGC was a requirement for their marriage. If they were to have children, would they tell them this story?

For unmarried women: Ask them if this story means anything to them. If they were to have children, would they tell them this story?

MUSLIM - Supporting verse: “Verily we created man of the best stature” (Quran: 96:4).
CHRISTIAN - Supporting verse: “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (Acts 10:15)

Wrap-up & Thank you!

If scriptural questions emerge, you will find Christian and Muslim FAQs and religious references in Module 2: “Teach Yourself”.
Engage Youth: Girls, Boys, &/or Mixed groups –
The Dignity of Human Life

This interactive exploration session is tailored specifically for the youth – whether girls alone, boys, or mixed youth groups – providing them with thoughtful opportunities to understand FGC and its consequences. How to engage different subgroups of youth will depend on local circumstances, but key messages remain constant:

The session should be facilitated by a faith leader, an elder, or any other member of the community who would normally be responsible for leading the regular youth group sessions. Because this topic is particularly sensitive, there are two main activities outlined in the module, one for children 14 and younger, and one for young adults ages 15-18.

Materials needed: In preparation for the youth group meeting, read the scriptural support elements in Module 2 to identify verses that you may want to use as part of the lesson. For information about FGC, refer to the “FGC Information Sheet”. And finally, use the anatomical flipchart in Module 2 for the anatomy lesson.
Activity
Creating a Safe Space – Before You Begin
Suggested Time: 15 minutes

Before you begin your first workshop with a group, it is important to establish what is called “safe space.” Safe space doesn't just happen – it's up to you to take a proactive role in creating an atmosphere that will best support the growth and learning of each participant. Here’s a quick activity that will help establish safe space:

8) Explain to participants that the workshop(s) they’ll be taking part in are not just about you teaching them, but rather about everyone discussing difficult issues and learning from one another. Say that in order to do this, we need to have a space in which each person feels comfortable and safe.

9) Ask the group, ‘How can we create a safe space?’ or ‘What do you need in order to feel comfortable with everyone in this group?’ Write the various answers that you hear on a large piece of paper or on a chalkboard so that everyone can see them.

10) Once you have received answers from as many participants as would like to contribute, read everything that is written on the paper aloud, and ask the group if they think anything should be added. If not, ask the group if they are willing to commit to upholding what is written as group standards for the workshop.

11) Have participants raise their hands if they promise to make this a safe, comfortable space for everyone!

It doesn’t have to end there! You can always come back to your safe space agreement. If your group ever meets again, you can remind people of their commitments at subsequent sessions. Additionally, if there is ever a difficult conversation or tension in the group, you can remind people of their safe space agreement and hold people to the intentions and norms that they set.

KEY TERM:
SAFE SPACE refers to a cooperative learning environment in which all participants feel comfortable and safe to fully participate. A safe space is one in which every person respects the ideas and thoughts of each other and people are supportive of each other’s growth and learning.
**Topic: God’s/Allah’s perfect creation**

**Initial icebreaker: “Things in Common.”**

12) Have all children stand in the center of the room/outdoor area. Begin the game by calling out things that may be true about many of the children in your group, e.g., “I like playing football (soccer)” “I have brown eyes!” “I have brothers and sisters!” and standing in a corner of the room (or designated “corner” in an outdoor space). Anyone who agrees or think that statement applies to them must stand in the same corner. Anyone who disagrees or think that the statement does not apply to them must go stand in the opposite corner.

13) Once it has been established who has been in what corner, call out a new statement. You can get more and more specific, e.g., “I know how to do a cartwheel!” “I am afraid of snakes!” “I have lived in the same house all my life!” If the children are comfortable enough to do so, have them call out the statements/things in common and walk over to the designated corners. Do this for 5 minutes or so, or until everyone is sufficiently warmed up/comfortable talking/standing/moving around with each other.

14) Then, sit down with everyone and discuss what they thought about the game, what they learned about each other. There should be common threads, and sometimes children may be surprised at with whom they share something in common. This should lead into a discussion about how we are unique, perfect creations of God/Allah, and that while all have individual value, we may have things in common that we did not even realize – because we are all human, whether we are boys or girls!

**Context:** Use the “FGC Information Sheet” to talk to the participants about 1) the definition of FGC, 2) Key Facts about FGC, and finally, 3) the frequently asked questions or myths about FGC. Take questions after each section.

**MUSLIM - Supporting verse:** “Verily we created man of the best stature.” (Quran: 96:4)

**CHRISTIAN - Supporting verse:** “God saw all that He had made, and (said) it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31)
Main activity:

Ages 14 and younger: Because there is some confusion about whether or not FGC is a practice accepted in our religion, it’s good to show how one true statement can get garbled and distorted before time, to the point where it becomes a completely false statement. Have the children sit in a circle, as appropriate, for a game of “Telephone.” Pick someone to start, and have that child whisper two things that they did that day into the ear of the child to their right. That child whispers what they heard to the child on their right, and so on, until the whispering has reached the last child in the circle. That child will then repeat out loud what s/he last heard. This will inevitably be an altered version of what was originally said. Let everyone react, then ask why they think that happened. This should lead into a discussion about how true teachings can get twisted over time, to the point where they are completely untrue. People’s beliefs on FGC are the same way: there is nowhere in our holy book that says FGC is right, but over time, some people decided that FGC was not just an ancient tradition, but part of their religion as well, just like in the game of “Telephone.”

Discussion questions: What did you think of this activity? Have you ever misunderstood something a friend or family member said, and thought it was the truth? Have you ever asked your Faith Leader if you had a question about a particular tenant or verse? Do you think boys and girls should be treated with equal love and respect?

Ages 15-18: Have the participants divide up into small groups. Instruct them to discuss what “evidence” they have that FGC is a faith-centered practice. Do this for about 10 minutes. When the conversation dies down, have one person from each group present what they talked about to the larger group. This will lead to a discussion of how things become accepted even though they are not necessarily true. You can use excerpts from our holy book to refute “evidence” during the discussion.

Discussion questions: Do you believe FGC is a faith-supported practice? Have you ever asked your Faith Leader if you had a question about our faith’s teaching on a similar topic?

[There is no obligation for the children to answer the questions below]

For girls: Have you undergone FGC? How do you feel about your experience?
For boys: What are your feelings about FGC?

Supporting verses: Go through the verses read before the main activity, and ask the children to think about what they mean. Emphasize, after all verses are read and discussed, that God/Allah wants us to seek out the truth on things we don’t understand, and always stand up for what is right, even if our society says it is wrong, and wants us to practice something harmful; we must above all love one another and do no harm. Then, turn their attention to these verses:
CHRISTIAN – “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” (Acts 10:15)
“Jesus said, ‘A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.’” (John 13:34-35)

MUSLIM - “And if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he/she has saved the life of the whole people.” (Quran 5:32)
Anatomy Lesson

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE: “Now, we are going to learn a little bit about God/Allah’s perfect creation, and why FGC is harmful to girls.”

Refer to anatomy flipchart in the Activity and Resource Kit and its accompanying speaking guide. Go through anatomy, as appropriate, and explain that chincha is a myth. Use illustrations as age-appropriate. For very young children, it may only be appropriate to teach the participants that chincha is a myth, as creatively as you can.

If you wish to do so, and if your participants are old enough, refer to the anatomy lesson included in this toolkit, and use the speaking guide to explain the various parts of the female anatomy to all participants. Allow plenty of time for questions and discussion.

Supporting verses:

CHRISTIAN - “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful.” (Psalm 139:14)
MUSLIM - “…and there is no changing Allah’s creation. And that is the proper religion but many people do not know.” (Quran 30:30)

Conclusion: We are creations of a perfect God/Allah, and we must treat each other with the love and kindness that such creations deserve. FGC is an act of violence, and a violation of God’s/Allah’s plan: it is almost like saying, “your creation is imperfect, let me correct it for you!” However, sometimes what is wrong can be perceived as what is right, simply because it has been garbled/distorted through multiple generations. We must seek knowledge on things we do not understand, and stand up for what is right, even if our society/tradition stands against us – that’s what God/Allah wants us to do!

Wrap-up & Thank you!
Activity Kit:
Everything You Need to Engage Your Community

The activity kit contains an early marriage flipchart activity and lesson instructions to be used as part of modules 4 and 5.