



End FGM
EUROPEAN NETWORK



HOW TO **TALK** ABOUT
FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION





→ IN A REPORT, ARTICLE, MEDIA FEATURE, POLICY PAPER, ETC.



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DO'S

✔ Use positive images

✘ Don't use shocking images that risk causing re-traumatisation of FGM survivors and of affected communities. Don't use graphic images or details such as blades or blood

✔ Use the term Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), as it is the internationally agreed upon term

✘ Don't use misleading terms, such as "circumcision". Don't use specific terms, such as "infibulation", to refer to all forms of FGM

✔ Use comprehensive, respectful and non-stigmatising language

✘ Don't fuel hate speech using words such as "barbaric", "disgusting", "savage" that are offensive and judgmental for affected communities. Do not use sensationalising headlines or terms

✔ Use the term "affected communities" as opposed to "practising communities" because it encompasses those who wish to leave the practice behind

✘ Don't assume that everyone in an affected community feels the same way about FGM

✔ Use the same words survivors choose to use when speaking, without re-phrasing what they say. Use factually-based arguments

✘ Don't romanticise or re-write a survivor's story

✔ FGM is a violation of human rights and a specific form of gender-based violence. FGM is only one of the many practices performed to control women's bodies and roles in society

✘ Don't portray FGM with a sense of cultural otherness, that reinforces stereotypes and misunderstandings

✔ Recognise all types of FGM are as harmful physically and/or psychologically. No hierarchy can be made in the pain and the trauma caused by FGM

✘ Don't focus only on the physical procedure itself

✔ Recognise FGM abandonment as a feminist issue. FGM aims at controlling women's bodies and sexualities. Both women and men play a role in the continuation or abandonment of the practice

✘ Don't label FGM as a "women's issue"

✔ Women and girls who have undergone FGM are survivors, not victims. Acknowledge survivors' resilience and strength

✘ Don't portray survivors as victims

✔ Tell positive stories as a way of promoting FGM abandonment. Show that change is possible and can be inspiring to others

✘ Don't forget many people and communities have abandoned FGM and cultural norms change over time. Change is possible and is happening

DON'TS

"Like every dictatorship that needs to hide its crimes, silence is its best weapon. Every time we raise our voices, we take a step towards equality. Help us raise awareness about this reality, because what is not known does not exist"

HAYAT TRASPAS, CO-FOUNDER OF SAVE A GIRL SAVE A GENERATION



"Many have expressed that they don't feel comfortable engaging in the fight to end FGM because they 'don't want to seem racist' or 'it's a practice that has nothing to do with me'"

SAMIRA FALL, RESEARCHER - FGM SURVIVOR



"People often tell me they feel sorry for me when I tell them I've been cut. They see me as a victim and they ask me intrusive questions"

SALIMA EL HADJ, INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STUDENT



"When people learn that FGM is also done in Egypt, they start telling me 'oh so you don't have any pleasure'. My intimacy isn't a topic that I want to discuss with just anybody. My trauma and my past are mine and I don't want people to assume anything about me. Just stop"

YASMINE AMARI, MIDWIFE





→ WHEN TALKING WITH A WOMAN AFFECTED BY FGM OR WITH MEMBERS OF AN AFFECTED COMMUNITY



Let people own their narrative and understand that every survivor has a different experience



Don't assume you already know their story, don't assume all stories are the same



Believe survivors when they tell their stories and treat affected communities with respect: they are the experts of their own experience



Don't minimise survivors experiences when they tell their stories



Let survivors tell you who they are and what they do today. Listen and respect them



Don't reduce survivors to their traumas and their pasts



Create a positive and safe environment when talking with a member of an affected communities



Don't play a survivor in opposition to her community. Don't judge a survivor's family for practising FGM



Use the terms the person you are talking to prefers to use, as many terms are used worldwide to refer to FGM



Don't use judging language and avoid alienation



Respect boundaries



Don't be intrusive and don't ask questions that might re-traumatise the survivor. Do not ask personal questions, or intimacy-based questions

COMMON MYTHS ←



MYTHS ✘ - VS - FACTS ✔



People who practise FGM are "barbaric" and "irrational"



When a family accepts to carry out FGM on its daughter, they wish to protect her against being stigmatised and socially excluded. A woman who has undergone FGM is socially accepted within her community and the society, and is ready to marry



Some forms of FGM are minor



All forms of FGM are harmful. Any form is a violation of human rights and a form of gender-based violence



FGM is a Muslim practice or a religious practice



FGM is not prescribed by Islam or by any other religion. FGM existed prior to the existence of monotheistic religions and is to this day also practised in some Christian communities for example



FGM is an African issue



More than 200 million women worldwide have undergone FGM. FGM happens on every continent in the world except Antarctica, it is a global issue. Also, in several African countries FGM is not practised



FGM is only practised by undereducated, socially disadvantaged people or in rural contexts



FGM occurs across all cultural and socio-economic groups



Practising FGM in a hospital reduces risk



Medicalised FGM (when practised in a healthcare facility) can be as harmful as when done traditionally and does not necessarily lead to a 'safer' practice. The psychological and physical effects of FGM remain serious and concerning

“Some girls get cut by doctors, in medicalised facilities. But that doesn't make it any less harmful and we need to raise awareness on the consequences of all forms of FGM, including medicalised FGM.”

SOKHNA FALL BA, CO-PRESIDENT OF THE END FGM EUROPEAN NETWORK



“Not involving men in the fight against FGM is like a doctor treating symptoms of a disease and ignoring the disease”

TONY MWEBIA, MEN END FGM ADVOCATE



“On many occasions, people have felt comfortable to ask me and other young women 'Have you undergone FGM?'”

FATIMA AWIL, THE END FGM EUROPEAN NETWORK





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