

Various Causes of Female Genital Mutilation across Sub-Saharan Africa

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Introduction

Female genital mutilation has been described by the World Health Organization as "all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons." FGM is practiced in 30 countries in western, eastern and north-eastern Africa, where it is a deeply rooted part of their culture. The prevalence of FGM varies from country to country but it has consistently been found that the majority of women undergo the practice in the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti and Eritrea), and in the Western African countries of Guinea, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Mauritania, Mali and Burkina Faso. The specific reasons for the continuance of FGM varies between countries but the causes normally revolve around culture, religion, politics, and lack of education/information.

When writing about FGM, it is important not to jump to making judgements, and is preferable to first fully understand why FGM is practiced in certain regions. Once you fully understand the arguments in favour of FGM in a given community, only then can you convincingly explain why these don't in fact justify female cutting. In order to be convincing it is important to give credit to the other side's argument and sincerely question whether girls in these societies actually should be cut.

Many western cultural and religious values would seem unnatural and bizarre to sub-Saharan Africans, so the topic of FGM must be approached in a respectful way that acknowledges the right to embrace cultural values and displays an understanding of those values, before going on to explain why they can nevertheless not justify female cutting.

Somalia

Somalia has one of the world's highest prevalence rates of FGM, with the World Health Organisation predicting in 2005 that 97.9% of Somali women had undergone an FGM procedure. Prevalence varies between regions and is said to be declining in the northern regions of Puntland and Somaliland where there has been a social and religious awareness campaign. The main cause of FGM in Somalia is linked to the concept of family honour.

Causes of FGM in Somalia;

Religion;

- Many people in Somalia view FGM as a religious obligation.
- Religious scholars and leaders in Somalia have been working to inform people that FGM is not in fact an obligation as Muhammad himself, and his community, didn't put their daughters through FGM procedures.

Culture;

- Many people see FGM as essential to attain family honour because the procedure is carried out to ensure the virginity of daughters.
- A woman who has not gone through this practice is often thought of as having loose morals.
- It is believed that women who do not go through FGM will secure less bride-wealth for their male family members.
- Some men claim that the artificial tightness heightens sexual enjoyment while others say the smoothness of the scar is esthetically attractive.
- Urban women are more against FGM than rural women.
- Excisors in Somalia are not highly respected and don't hold influence or status within the power structure of the country.

Stigma;

- Women can be discriminated against and isolated from their families and communities if they refuse these practices.
- Young girls who haven't been cut are often bullied in school. This, along with pressure from their family means many young girls agree to the procedure.

Social Advantage;

- By undergoing these procedures, girls are accepted into their community and have better marriage prospects therefore gaining financial security.

Lack of Information;

- Much like all countries where FGM is practiced, one of the main reasons it continues is because people aren't aware of the risks. They are also unaware that the practice isn't in fact obligatory.
- In the regions where NGOs have carried out workshops and seminars to raise awareness, there has been a decline in the prevalence of FGM.

Possible Article Titles: "FGM Awareness Raising Programmes in Somalia", "FGM and Family Honour", "Removing Stigma Around FGM".

Find More Information at:

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prevalence_of_female_genital_mutilation_by_country#Somalia
- https://www.unicef.org/somalia/SOM_FGM_Advocacy_Paper.pdf
- <http://www.refworld.org/docid/46d5787c32.html>

Djibouti

According to UNICEF, the FGM prevalence rate in Djibouti is between 93-98% of women aged 15-49. FGM in Djibouti, much like its neighbouring countries, is predominantly justified on the basis of religion however there are other cultural reasons for the practice.

Causes of FGM in Djibouti;

Religion;

- 66% of women who have undergone FGM, claimed religion and tradition were the motivations for doing so.
- Djibouti is a predominantly Muslim where Islamic clerics have been divided on the FGM issue, with some actively supporting the practice and others opposing it.

Culture;

- Much like most of the countries where FGM is practiced, it is linked to a rite of passage into adulthood.
- FGM is performed partly for hygienic and aesthetic reasons as external female genitalia are considered to be dirty and unsightly.
- Removing sensitive tissue is thought to curb female sexual pleasure ensuring virginity, chastity and fidelity.
- It is thought to enhance fertility and promote child survival.

Social Advantage;

- FGM is thought to be necessary to maintain social cohesion. It is justified partly on the basis that it controls women and the role they have in society.
- Women who refuse the practice are ostracised.

Lack of Information;

- Many of the justifications for FGM are based on misinformation, as Islam doesn't require FGM, nor does FGM enhance fertility.
- If people don't realise their justifications are misinformed, they will continue to think they have good reason to carry on the procedures.

Possible Article Titles; “Dispelling Myths Surrounding FGM”, “The link between Islam and FGM”

Find More Information at;

- <http://europepmc.org/articles/PMC3598278>
- <http://28toomany.org/countries/djibouti/>

Mali

Mali has the third highest percentage incidence of FGM out of the sub-Saharan countries, with 92% of women between 15 and 49 being subjected to the practice according to a 2007 report. In Mali the justifications for FGM are based in various religions, and so the prevalence of FGM varies between religions and ethnic groups. FGM is practiced on around 92% of Muslim women and 76% of Christian women.

Causes of FGM in Mali;

Religion;

- The specific rationale for FGM varies between religions and ethnic groups, but every religion practiced in Mali supports FGM.
- About 64% of Malian women believe FGM is a religious requirement.
- In the past FGM formed part of the marriage ceremony and was performed on girls of about 14 or 15, the age however has since lowered.
- In some groups, such as the Dogon in the region of Mopti and the Senoufo in the region of Sikasso, this practise is used as part of an initiation. The procedure is part of the rites of passage to womanhood preparing girls for marriage. Malian societies view both males and females as children until they are circumcised.
- Some Bambara and Dogon believe that if the clitoris comes in contact with the baby's head during birth, the child will die.
- Some believe that both the female and the male sex exist within a child at birth and it is necessary to rid the female body of vestiges of maleness to overcome any sexual ambiguity.
- Bambara men believe that upon entering an unexcised woman, a man could be killed by the secretion of a poison from the clitoris.

Culture;

- FGM is advocated for nowhere in the Bible or Qur'an, so many of the religious rationales listed above stem originally from deeply entrenched folk beliefs that have become interwoven with religion.
- Because the cultural and religious beliefs are so entrenched, attempts to challenge FGM rituals are met with strong social opposition.

Politics;

- Religious leaders, particularly Islamic leaders have a prominent role in Malian societies, so while the government has shown signs of wanting to end the practice, some political figures fear the backlash that will come from religious leaders.

Lack of Information;

- There is little to no information provided to Malian communities on the health, or social consequences of FGM, and therefore they don't understand how harmful the practice is.
- The people who perform these practices often either haven't received an education, or don't realise that there are other ways they could make money.
- Without appreciating the true dangers of FGM, Malian people see no reason to stop when it is so culturally significant to them.

Lack of Legislation;

- Mali is one of the 3 African countries where there is no federal law against FGM. Without legislation, it is harder to convince citizens that the practice is wrong.
- The Penal Code's provisions against assault and grievous bodily harm might provide some protection, although no attempts at prosecution for this practice have been reported.

Social Advantage;

- Aside from the long-term physical and emotional trauma, FGM makes a girl's life easier.
- Being cut makes it easier to find a place in society including access to education and the chance of being married.

Possible Article Titles; "The Religious Importance of FGM", "The Work being done to Eradicate FGM", "The Health Risks of FGM", "The Importance of Education on FGM".

Find More Information at;

- <http://www.refworld.org/docid/46d5787a55.html>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/apr/05/why-malians-must-forge-anti-fgm-feeling-themselves#img-1>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prevalence_of_female_genital_mutilation_by_country#Mali

Sudan

According to UNICEF nearly 90% of Sudanese women have undergone an FGM procedure, typically the most severe type. However attitudes are changing and now 50% of women in Sudan now believe the practice should be discontinued. FGM continues in Sudan partly because of religious justifications and partly because it is culturally associated with beautification and purification.

Causes of FGM in Sudan;

Religion;

- Many people rely on religious justifications for the practice, especially in the Muslim communities.

Culture;

- FGM is culturally associated with purity, beauty and virginity and is therefore seen as a prerequisite for marriage by many communities.

- Circumcised girls are always described by the famous phrase, “waa halati,” meaning, “what a nice girl!”

– Midwives use propaganda to increase their business. When a midwife is among a large number of women, she tells stories about uncircumcised girls always being dirty even if they spend the whole day showering.

– Men don’t take any action against the practice because they believe it is a “woman’s affair.”

Lack of Information;

- There is no long-term strategy in place to eradicate FGM in Sudan and this includes an absence of educational and awareness raising programmes. People are therefore unaware of the risks associated with FGM.

– NGOs tend to concentrate their efforts in urban areas, and therefore there is little help or education being provided by them to rural communities.

Lack of Legislation;

- Not all states in Sudan have laws against FGM. This means in states where there is no legislation, people have no reason to believe that FGM is wrong.

–The lack of legislation in some states may also undermine the legislation that exists in other states because it isn’t seen as important enough to apply to all of Sudan.

- There are no strict measures to defend children.

– Where there are no laws against FGM, this indirectly gives official support to the people who carry out the practice.

– Where the more extreme types of FGM are illegal, midwives get around the laws by claiming they are only performing Sunna, a less extreme and for the most part legal form of the procedure.

Social Advantage;

- There is stigma associated with not undergoing FGM, and therefore undergoing FGM is seen as beneficial, if not necessary to remain a part of the community.

Possible Article Titles: “The Various anti-FGM Legislation in Sudan”, “The Cultural Relevance of FGM”, “The Role of Midwives in the Continuance of FGM.”

Find More Information at;

- https://www.unicef.org/protection/sudan_71891.html

- <http://www.wluml.org/node/5575>

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prevalence_of_female_genital_mutilation_by_country#Sudan

Eritrea

In 2003, the government of Eritrea published an official FGM prevalence rate of 89%. Most FGM in Eritrea (68%) is practiced on girls less than a year old. The prevalence varies between religions and regions, but the rationale is rooted in a desire to control the sexual desires of women.

Causes of FGM in Eritrea;

Religion;

- Many people who subject their daughters to FGM believe it is a religious obligation.
- According to UNICEF 60% of Eritrean women believe FGM is a religious requirement, however according to the Eritrean Government only 18% believe it is a religious requirement.
- The prevalence varies between religions and according to a 2002 UNICEF survey FGM is prevalent among 99% of Muslim, 89% of Catholic and 85% of Protestant women aged 15–49 years old.

Culture;

- Many people continue the practice because it was their ancestors' belief that it should be done and therefore it is an important part of their culture.
- There is a lot of social and familial pressure to continue the practice. Grandmothers are a particular source of pressure within most family units.
- In some cases, grandmothers will subject their granddaughters to FGM without the parents' consent.
- It is widely believed that girls who have not undergone the procedure are promiscuous.
- The practice doesn't really happen to girls over the age of 7 and therefore the girls being subjected to it have no choice in the matter, nor do they have any way to seek protection or advocate against the practice.

Lack of Information;

- Public awareness of the health risks involved with FGM is very low, especially among midwives who typically carry out the procedure.

Possible Article Titles: “The Influence of Grandmothers in Eritrean Families”, “The importance of Awareness on FGM”

Find More Information at;

- http://www.stopfgm.net/wp-content/uploads/vor2013/grundlagen/worku_zerai_fgm_eritrea_2003.pdf
- https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/eritrea_52819.html
- https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/eoir/legacy/2013/06/10/eritrea_2.pdf

Guinea

According to UNICEF, Guinea once had the second highest FGM prevalence rate in the world. Among the 15-19 year-olds the prevalence was 89%, and among 20-24 year-olds it was 95%. There are strict laws against FGM in Guinea and even death sentences if the girl dies with 40 days of the procedure. However the incidence of FGM remains high, partly due to deeply rooted traditional values, partly because the focus in Guinea has been medicalizing FGM rather than stopping it, and partly because of a lack of judicial action.

Causes of FGM in Guinea;

Religion;

- About 50% of women in Guinea believe FGM is a religious requirement.
- Guinea is predominantly a Muslim country, however, the high FGM rates are observed across all religions in Guinea.
- FGM is prevalent in 99% of Muslim women, 94% of Catholics and Protestants, and 93% of Animist women.
- Many influential religious leaders still support the practice.

Culture;

- The practice is rooted in family tradition. Girls usually live with their families until they get married, however without undergoing FGM it is hard to find a husband. This leads to mocking from other people in the village.
- It is seen as dishonourable to refrain from the practice.
- The social pressure is such that girls often request the procedure out of fear of being excluded from society or being forced to remain unmarried.
- The practice is sometimes seen as an initiation rite and girls from different families are excised together in homes or camps. Recently however there has been a move towards individual excisions due to financial restraints and fear of legal sanctions.

Social Advantage;

- By agreeing to the procedure, a girl and her family retain their honour and therefore remain integrated in society and have a better chance of getting married.

Medicalization;

- There has been a recent trend in favour of medicalizing FGM rather than stopping it so it is done more safely. This however still means that FGM is being widely performed.
- Despite this movement, a 2010 decree prohibits private or public health institutions from practicing FGM.

Lack of Judicial Action;

- Legal texts prohibiting FGM are generally not respected.
- Local Judicial Authorities such as prosecutors and instructing magistrates are aware that thousands of girls are being excised but do nothing to stop it.
- Excision practitioners rarely face legal action and no legal practitioners have ever been sanctioned for FGM.
- When justice personnel have tried to address FGM, they have faced severe pressure and threats.

– Since 2014 only 8 people have been convicted of FGM and they received either suspended sentences or small fines.

Possible Article Titles: “FGM and Access to Justice”, “Religions Misunderstandings and FGM”, “How Stigma causes FGM”.

Find More Information at:

- <http://ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=19869&LangID=E>
- <http://www.refworld.org/docid/46d5787832.html>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prevalence_of_female_genital_mutilation_by_country#Guinea

Sierra Leone

FGM is extremely prevalent in Sierra Leone and according to a 2008 study, 88% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 have undergone the procedure. One of the main reasons for the prevalence of FGM in Sierra Leone is the power held by secret societies called the Bondo Society which practises cutting as an initiation.

Causes of FGM in Sierra Leone;

Culture;

- The Bondo secret society, which practices FGM, has existed for hundreds of years and is designed to protect the community from evil spirits and aid the passage from adolescence to womanhood. They believe that without undergoing their cultural rituals, including FGM, a girl won't receive the rites of passage into adulthood.
- The Bondo society exists throughout Sierra Leone and therefore exerts great influence on almost all parts of the country, potentially more influence than the government.
- The secret societies believe that the women who aren't cut will have trouble conceiving, bad luck, psychological trauma or be considered unworthy of marriage.
- FGM supporters believe that these practices celebrate female sexuality rather than oppressing it.
- Bondo Elders think that excision enhances sexual satisfaction for a woman and improves the appearance of the genitalia while making it easier to penetrate.
- A lot of people in Sierra Leone believe abandoning FGM would be an abandonment of their culture.

Shame;

- A great deal of shame and ostracisation is brought to a girl and her family if she refuses the practice. A 16 year-old girl from Sierra Leone who is refusing the practice claimed "Anyone who doesn't join the society they say is dirty, they make me feel ashamed."
- This girl was also prevented from going to school for two years as punishment for refusing the practice.
- Opponents to the practice are demeaned and punished. For example four female journalists in Kenema were forced to strip before being frog-marched through the streets because they spoke unfavourably on radio against FGM.
- Members of the Bondo society are seen as having higher social standing partly because the cost of the FGM initiation is expensive, so being initiated displays financial stability.
- FGM continues partly because a girl's life could be made very difficult if she refuses to be cut.

Social Advantage;

- It is understandable why many families have their daughters cut given that there are benefits derived from the practice.
- It ensures that their daughters remain a part of the community and therefore increases the chance they will finish their education.
- It increases the chance that they will get married and have a more stable and successful family when they're older.

Politics;

- The leaders of the Bondo societies (known as Soweis), who are also the women who perform these procedures hold a great deal of political power.
- Failures in the modern government have meant people look to local leaders, boosting the influence of

the Bondo society.

- The societies exist across the country so politicians use them to communicate with rural villages.
- A senior parliamentarian sponsored the circumcision of several dozen initiates in the south-eastern cities of Bo and Kailahun in return for votes.
- When a rumour circulated that the government was going to ban the secret societies, and consequently their FGM ceremonies, women in the public gallery threatened to walk out of parliament.

Lack of Information;

- There is little access to information on the harmfulness of these practices and therefore people are misinformed as to the consequences of FGM and don't realise how serious it is.
- For example, Many FGM supporters claim that the health problems associated with the practice are not specific to those who have been cut because the rate for infertility for both those who have and have not been cut is 10%. Some also claim that the reason for increase of still births in circumcised women is not because of the FGM but because of a delay in receiving prenatal care and visiting hospitals because they fear being stigmatized.
- Because the health risks aren't understood, many people see FGM as the same as male circumcision which is widely accepted.
- It is widely believed that education and raising awareness could help eliminate FGM.

Lack of Legislation;

- Sierra Leone is one of the 3 African countries where there is no federal law against FGM. Without legislation, it is harder to convince citizens that the practice is wrong.

Possible Article Titles; “The Cultural Significance of FGM”, “The Health Problems Associated with FGM”, “The Political Significance of the Bondo Secret Societies”, “Ways to Eradicate FGM.”

Find More Information at;

- <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/aug/24/sierra-leone-female-genital-mutilation-soweis-secret-societies-fear>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Female_genital_mutilation_in_Sierra_Leone
- <http://www.refworld.org/docid/46d5787cc.html>

Gambia

In a 2013 report it was estimated that 76.1% of women in Gambia had been subjected to FGM. The procedure is carried out almost entirely on girls before they reach adolescence, but prevalence rates vary significantly between ethnic groups. FGM is much more common in rural as opposed to urban areas with rates of about 56% in urban areas, but exceeding 90% in rural areas. The most common cause of FGM in Gambia is misplaced religious beliefs.

Causes of FGM in Gambia;

Religion;

- The majority of girls who undergo FGM, do it because they think their religion mandates it.
- The opinion of The Gambia’s Supreme Islamic Council is divided. Some argue that the passages in the Qur’an indicate that FGM is not prohibited and is therefore justified, while others argue that it is not promoted and thus is not a religious obligation.

Culture;

- FGM is seen as giving girls their rite of passage into womanhood.
- It is generally the older women who are the major force behind maintaining the practice, and often pursue reluctant girls, forcing them to have the procedure, sometimes without the consent of the girl’s parents.
- It is hard for a girl to resist pressure from all her extended family members.
- The enticement of a big party, festive cooking and new clothes are commonly used as incentives for a girl to undergo the procedure.
- Excisors are invested in continuing the practice because it provides them with a financial income and social status.
- An increase in anti-Western sentiment can negatively affect the perception of the work done by NGOs.

The Media;

- What is portrayed in the media is affected by what the government believes.
- There used to be a ban on media outlets openly discussing the health implications of FGM and delivering messages against the practice.
- The ban has since been lifted but NGOs using the media to raise awareness have still faced restrictions, for example the Gambian Radio Station still limits broadcasts explicitly addressing FGM.

Lack of Consistent Governmental Approach;

- There is a lack of specific anti-FGM legislation in Gambia.
- People continue to look to Sharia and customary law which doesn’t prohibit FGM.
- Fluctuations in the government’s position on FGM threaten campaigns against it.
- There hasn’t been coordination between various organisations and the government so no holistic approach has been taken which leads to varying outcomes in different regions.

Possible Article Titles; “What the Government can do to Eradicate FGM,” “Does Religion really Support FGM?” “How NGOs can better help Eliminate FGM”

Find More Information at;

- http://www.28toomany.org/media/file/profile/Gambia_v5_high.pdf
- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/nov/24/how-the-gambia-banned-female-genital-mutilation>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prevalence_of_female_genital_mutilation_by_country#Gambia

Burkina Faso

In 2006 the World Health Organisation claimed that 72.5% of women from Burkina Faso had been subjected to FGM. As with many other countries, FGM is closely linked to religion, and prevalence varies between religions. There are also many sociocultural rationales behind the practice in Burkina Faso.

Causes of FGM in Burkina Faso;

Religion;

- Many people see FGM is a religious obligation.
- FGM is prevalent in 82% of Muslim women, 73% of traditional religions, 69% of Roman Catholics and 65% of Protestants.

Culture;

- Originally FGM had the single goal of ensuring the fidelity of a woman.
- It is associated with a rite of passage into adulthood.
- The Mossi people (largest ethnic group in Burkina Faso) often seclude young girls during the cutting and teach them about being young wives and mothers. At the end of the seclusion there is a village wide celebration with dancing and drinking.
- FGM is also done for aesthetic reasons.
- Many people think FGM is more sanitary.
- Some people believe an infant will die if it touches the clitoris of its unexcised mother during childbirth.
- Some people believe FGM enhances a woman's childbearing capacity.
- Some of the more urban women in Burkina Faso believe that FGM is a way to continue the domination of women, by making sure a woman is more docile and less likely to run after other men.

Lack of Information;

- Many people are unaware of the physical and mental health risks so don't see the importance of eliminating the practice.
- A lot of local authorities and judicial personnel are unaware of the severity of the consequences of FGM so don't understand the importance of enforcing anti-FGM laws.

Possible Article Titles; "Sociocultural beliefs on FGM", "The Legal Status of FGM in Burkina Faso."

Find More Information at;

- <http://www.refworld.org/docid/46d57874c.html>
- http://www.28toomany.org/media/file/profile/Burkino_Faso_v4_Low.pdf

Mauritania

A 2007 UN demographic cluster study found that 71% of women aged 15-49 years old had undergone FGM. The prevalence of FGM varies massively between ethnic groups in Mauritania; 92% of Soninke women undergo FGM, about 70% of Fulbe and Moorish women undergo the practice, but only 28% of Wolof women have undergone FGM. The main cause of FGM in Mauritania is that it is fiercely defended on religious grounds.

Causes of FGM in Mauritania;

Religion;

-FGM has been associated with Islam in Mauritania and many people believe Allah wants their daughters to be cut.

– There is a strongly held religious belief that girls who don't undergo FGM are unclean, won't have their prayers answered and can't get married.

– Mauritania is 99% Muslim and about 57% of the women in Mauritania believe FGM is a religious requirement.

– However in 2010, 34 Islamic scholars signed a fatwa (religious opinion) banning FGM and deeming the procedure harmful.

– The fatwa won't be effect unless religious leaders bring the message to the people.

– Many governmental and NGO workers believe that it's the religious leaders who have the most influence and the last say in communities. Therefore it is the fatwa that has the potential to have the most effect, above and beyond legislation or NGO work.

Culture;

- FGM is an ancient part of the Mauritanian culture and therefore people are defensive of it and oppose threats to ban it.

–It is thought to ensure that a girl is clean and ready for womanhood.

– Because FGM is practiced in some communities for cultural reasons as well as or instead of religious reasons, the fatwa will have no effect in these communities.

Lack of Access to Justice;

- In 2005 Mauritania ratified the Maputo Protocol and introduced an Ordinance prohibiting FGM in infants and children. However this seems to have had little impact as there has been no statistically significant decrease in FGM since 2005.

– There isn't much data available on the matter, but this is most likely because the law wasn't implemented or enforced properly at a local level. This could be exacerbated by the sway of religious leaders in communities.

Possible Article Titles: "The impact of Religion on FGM in Mauritania", "How the Fatwa can help Eliminate FGM", "How Access to Justice could Help Eliminate FGM."

Find More Information at;

- https://www.unicef.org/health/mauritania_66159.html

- <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/8464671.stm>

Ethiopia

In 2016 the World Health Organisation estimated that the prevalence of FGM in Ethiopia was 65% in women of 15-49 years old, and falling to 47.1 % for those aged 15-19 years old. The prevalence of FGM varies massively between the regions of Ethiopia, with the Somali region having 98.5% and the Tigray region only 24.2%. Much like other sub-Saharan countries, the cause for the continuance of FGM in Ethiopia is a deep cultural belief that women who do not get cut are in some way unclean or unfit for marriage.

Causes of FGM in Ethiopia;

Religion;

- Many people use their religion to justify the practice, despite it not being required by the Qur'an or Bible.
- FGM is prevalent in 92% of Muslim women, but there is a lower prevalence in other religions with 65.8% in Protestants, 58.2% in Catholics and 55% in Traditional Religions.
- Some Coptic Christian priests refuse to baptize girls who have not undergone one of the procedures.

Culture;

- Having an FGM procedure done in Ethiopia is often associated with positive attributes such as gaining respect within a community and becoming a woman.
- Girls who do not undergo the procedure are more likely to be considered promiscuous and less likely to be worthy of marriage.
- Some Communities see circumcision as an essential precondition for marriage and motherhood, and so an uncircumcised female cannot be recognized as a woman.
- Many people believe that uncircumcised women are inept at carrying out domestic chores.
- Some people believe external female genitals are unclean.

Lack of Information;

- Much like many of the other countries in Africa, there is a lack of information on the harmful effects of FGM, and so people see no reason to stop the practice.
- Sex and sexuality are taboo subjects in Ethiopia, so women are culturally disinclined to discuss FGM and whether they think it is a good thing or not.

Social Advantage;

- There are social benefits to undergoing the procedure. Many families want their daughters to be cut because it means they have a better chance of finding a husband and won't face ostracism from the community.

Possible Article Titles: "The Benefits Associated with FGM", "Various Religious Views on FGM", "The Importance of Finding a Husband in Ethiopia."

Find More Information at;

- <http://28toomany.org/media/uploads/ethiopiafinal.pdf>
- https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ethiopia_51122.html

Liberia

It is estimated that the prevalence of FGM in Liberia is about 58% among women aged 15-49. Many believe that the civil war in the late 1980s caused a reduction in the practice because it caused extreme dislocation of the population disrupting rural life and the traditional institutions which used the practice. Now that the civil war has ended, these institutions are rebuilding themselves, so the prevalence of FGM is expected to increase in Liberia in the coming years. The institution I'm referring to is the Sande secret society, of which the Bondo Society in Sierra Leone is a limb.

Causes of FGM in Liberia;

Culture;

- Much like in Sierra Leone, the Sande society exists across Liberia, however it is much more common in rural areas, and following the war it has much less reach than the societies in Sierra Leone.
 - It therefore holds little political power in comparison to the societies in Sierra Leone.
 - The cultural rationales for FGM are extremely similar to those in Sierra Leone as they stem from the same society.
- The Sande secret society has existed for hundreds of years and is designed to protect the community from evil spirits and aid the passage from adolescence to womanhood. They believe that without undergoing their cultural rituals and initiation, including FGM, a girl won't receive the rites of passage into adulthood.
 - The secret societies believe that the women who aren't cut will have trouble conceiving, bad luck, psychological trauma or be considered unworthy of marriage.
 - FGM supporters believe that these practices celebrate female sexuality rather than oppressing it.
 - Sande Elders think that excision enhances sexual satisfaction for a woman and improves the appearance of the genitalia while making it easier to penetrate.
 - There are 3 small schools operating periodically in Monrovia where initiates spend a weekend in a Sande House. Here they undergo an FGM procedure and learn how to take care of a family and household as an initiation into the society.
 - All males and uninitiated females are prohibited from discussing Sande issues, including FGM.

Social Advantage;

- It is understandable why many families have their daughters cut given that there are benefits derived from the practice.
 - Being a member of the Sande society brings political autonomy and higher social status. It is also a place where women can go without their husband's permission.
 - If a girl refuses the practice she receives a great deal of shame and is often ostracized from her community and even family.
 - FGM ensures that girls remain a part of the community and therefore increases the chance they will finish their education.
 - It increases the chance that they will get married and have a more stable and successful family when they're older.

Lack of Information;

- The physical and emotional health risks associated with FGM aren't properly understood.

- FGM is not illegal in Liberia but kidnapping and forced initiation into the Sande societies is illegal. Most girls and women are unaware of their rights to decline initiation.

Possible Article Titles; “The Influence of the Sande Society”, “The Harm caused by FGM”.

Find More Information at;

- <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/54bcdf574.pdf>

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prevalence_of_female_genital_mutilation_by_country#Liberia

- <http://www.refworld.org/docid/46d5787a28.html>

Guinea Bissau

The prevalence rate of FGM in Guinea Bissau is around 50% of women and girls. The practice persists in this country for many of the reasons common to the majority of countries where FGM is practiced. There reasons are predominantly the force of traditions and cultural beliefs, and the lack of information on the consequences of FGM.

Causes of FGM in Guinea Bissau;

Culture;

- FGM is deeply rooted in tradition, specifically as part of a ceremony initiating girls into womanhood. However the procedure is generally carried out on girls between the ages of 6 and 14, and sometimes even in infants.
- FGM is viewed as essential to ensure virginity and find an honourable husband.
- As in many countries it is done partly for aesthetic and hygienic reasons.
- It is thought to prevent child mortality.

Religion;

- Many people see FGM as a religious requirement which is prescribed by the Qur'an.
- Some believe that without undergoing FGM one would not be able to have a proper Muslim burial.
- However some Islamic organizations, which have been working with UNICEF on social development issues at the community level, are starting to point out that the practice is not required by Islam.

Political Instability;

- Before the Civil War in the late 1990s there were awareness raising programmes in place to provide information on the harm caused by FGM, however the political instability and lack of funding meant these programmes couldn't continue.
- The government hasn't done much to help eradicate the practice, especially compared to its neighboring counterpart in Senegal where there is now a much lower prevalence of FGM.

Lack of Information;

- It is easier to campaign against FGM in urban areas where it is better understood and mostly rejected.
- In rural areas there is little information about the health risks, or the opinion of high-ranking religious leaders who reject the practice.
- Many women don't see any connection between FGM and their later health and fertility complications, highlighting the need for information.
- Activists have claimed that they've only had success in rural areas once they suggested an alternative, and harmless, ritual to replace FGM.

Possible Articles; "Possible Replacements to FGM", "How Political Instability contributes to FGM"

Find More Information at;

- https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/guineabissau_41785.html
- http://afrol.com/News2002/gub001_fgm_rites.htm

Chad

According to Chad's first survey on FGM in 2004, the prevalence rate was 45%, however this varies between religions and ethnic groups. The reasons for the continuance of the practice are largely rooted in the protectiveness the people have for deeply entrenched traditions.

Causes of FGM in Chad;

Religion;

- Roughly 23% of the women in Chad assume FGM is a religious requirement.
- FGM is prevalent in 61% of Muslim women, 31% of Catholics, 16% of Protestants, and 12% of traditional religions.

Culture;

- There is a deeply entrenched belief that FGM is a necessary part of a girl's rite of passage into womanhood.
- The practice is normally performed on girls who are too young to defy parental guidance or seek help or protection which may be available.
- FGM is seen as essential for social respectability.

Lack of Information;

- Particularly in rural areas there is little access to information on just how harmful FGM can be both physically and psychologically.

Possible Article Titles; "How to Provide Information in FGM to Rural Villages" "Is FGM Necessary to Earn Respect"

Find More Information at;

- <http://www.refworld.org/docid/46d5787432.html>
- <http://28toomany.org/countries/chad/>
- <http://www.refugeelegalaidinformation.org/chad-fgm>

Côte d'Ivoire

FGM is prevalent in 36.4 % of women aged 15-49 in Côte d'Ivoire according to the World Health Organisation in 2006. FGM prevalence varies by region and ethnic group, and is becoming more of an urban problem following the recent massive population displacement. As with most countries, the justifications for the practice are largely cultural and religious.

Causes of FGM in Côte d'Ivoire;

Religion;

- Some see FGM as a religious requirement.
- FGM is prevalent in 76% of Muslim women, 45% of Animist, 14% of Catholic and 13% of Protestant women.

Culture;

- FGM is seen as a way to test the endurance and courage of young girls.
- It guarantees a wife's faithfulness.
- It is a ritual of purification as girls who aren't excised are regarded as dirty.
- It is seen as a vital part of social integration as it is preparation for life as a housewife.
- Mothers generally have a desire to host an elaborate party for them and their family to welcome their daughter into womanhood, which follows an FGM procedure.
- The Sande Society, which exists in Sierra Leone and Liberia, also exists in Côte d'Ivoire but to a somewhat lesser extent.
- These societies exist in some of the villages in Côte d'Ivoire, where they believe that the clitoris possesses power and its removal during initiation gives that power to the village spirits and traditional spiritual leaders. They believe that without that power the entire village would die.
- Attempts to eradicate the practice, or even to transform it from a physical to a symbolic act, are perceived as threatening to "assassinate the people" of the village.
- The people who perform FGM do it so they can earn a living and higher social status.

Social Advantage;

- Women who refuse FGM are sometimes excluded from society.
- If a woman is preparing to get married, and her future husband and in-laws demand she get cut, refusing to submit to these wishes challenges the entire power structure of the extended family. This often leads to the marriage being cancelled.

Medicalization;

- There has been a recent trend in favour of medicalizing FGM rather than stopping it so it is done more safely. This however still means that FGM is being widely performed, so the long-term health complications are still being suffered.

Possible Article Titles; "The Sande Society in Côte d'Ivoire", "Why Medicalization isn't a Long-term Solution"

Find More Information at:

- https://www.unicef.org/wcaro/wcaro_factsheet_CI_FGM_gb.pdf

- <http://www.refworld.org/docid/46d57875c.html>

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prevalence_of_female_genital_mutilation_by_country#C.C3.B4te_d.27lvoire

Nigeria

A 2008 demographic survey found 30% of all Nigerian women have been subjected to FGM, 80% of which were under the age of one when the procedure was done. There isn't as strong a link between religion and FGM in Nigeria as there is in many other African countries. In Nigeria FGM is prevalent in 31% of Catholics, 27% of Protestant and only 7% of Muslim women. This means that the main reason why FGM continues in Nigeria, is commitment to ancient cultural myths and traditional beliefs.

Culture;

- In many communities it is culturally dictated that women who don't undergo FGM are promiscuous, unclean and unworthy of marriage.
- There are also misguided beliefs that absence of FGM creates health problems for both the woman and any children she may have.
- One specific traditional belief is that if a male child's head touches the clitoris during childbirth, he will die.
- Generally, the women who carry out these procedures are highly regarded members of the community.
- FGM is carried out because it is thought to decrease female sexual desire, and increase male sexual pleasure.
- It is an important part of cultural identity. Often women feel more as though they truly belong to their community, if they go through the same rituals as everyone else. It is therefore important for social cohesion and acceptance.

Social Pressure;

- There is an immense amount of pressure to conform to community beliefs and values.
- Those who don't conform face being ostracised, denied education, and left unable to get married and start a family.

Lack of Information;

- People are unaware that FGM is in fact harmful to women and instead of enhancing fertility and health, it in fact causes serious long term problems for women and their babies.

Possible Article Titles; "FGM and the Importance of Cultural Identity" "Is Cultural Identity More Important than Health"

Find More Information at;

- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/may/29/outlawing-fgm-nigeria-hugely-important-precedent-say-campaigners>
- <http://www.refworld.org/docid/46d5787bc.html>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prevalence_of_female_genital_mutilation_by_country#Nigeria

Senegal

According to a 2005 survey, the FGM prevalence rate in Senegal is 28% of all women aged between 15 and 49. The prevalence varies by region and religion. One of the main reasons for the continuance of FGM in Senegal is the need to hold on to cultural traditions, which the older generation fear are being lost.

Causes of FGM in Senegal;

Religion;

- 15.5% of all women in Senegal aged 15-49 incorrectly believed that FGM is a religious obligation.
- Senegal is 94% Muslim.
- FGM is prevalent in 29% of Muslim women, 16% of Animists, and 11% of Christian women.
- After an FGM practitioner was prosecuted in 2009 for carrying out the procedure on a 16 month-old girl, around 200 Marabouts (local Islamic preachers) spoke out in defence of the woman and the practice.
- Preachers in the north of Senegal have been reluctant to denounce FGM, with one preacher even issuing a fatwa in favour of the practice.

Culture;

- Many people see FGM as a crucial part of their cultural identity and view the law against it as an attack by both “whites” and the Senegalese Government.
- FGM is seen as improving marriage prospects, as it preserves virginity and those who are uncut are often excluded from society.
- Some communities in Senegal, particularly in the North and South are concerned about an intergenerational gap developing which is leading to a loss of culture. A grandmother from the Casamance region is reported to have claimed “We are no longer really black except by our skin colour. We are not white either. We have ceased being ourselves and we no longer know who we are.”
- Many communities see NGOs, who are trying to help end FGM, as outsiders who are bringing a form of cultural colonialism disguised as development. Continuing FGM therefore becomes a symbol of resistance against the West, who they believe are imposing their views.
- In rural areas customary and rural practices take precedence over the law of the country, which is therefore disrespected if it conflicts with tradition.

Lack of Information;

- In rural areas many women are unaware that they have legal rights protecting them from FGM and all other forms of discrimination.
- There is little evidence of women seeking medical help for the health problems they have which arise from FGM. This could be because they don’t realise how harmful these health problems are, that there is a connection between their health problems and FGM, or that they are even allowed to discuss or acknowledge these problems.
- Some women also believe their health problems are caused by God or witchcraft, so they accept the consequences without seeking help or questioning the practice.
- Studies have shown that accessing a general education isn’t enough to change views on FGM, “rather that it acted as a mediating variable through which other processes, such as the diffusion of new information, operate” (UNICEF, 2008).

Possible Articles Titles; “Why Abandoning FGM doesn’t mean Abandoning your Culture,” “Why NGOs are trying to Help not Attack”, “How to Fix an Intergenerational Gap without FGM”.

Find More Information at;

- https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/senegal_30046.html
- http://www.28toomany.org/media/file/profile/CountryProfile_Senegal_2015_Compressed.pdf
- <http://www.refworld.org/docid/46d5787b32.html>

Central African Republic

The World Health Organisation estimates that the prevalence of FGM in Central African Republic was 24.2% in 2010. The reason for FGM in CAR is predominantly based on the general traditional beliefs common to most African countries.

Religion;

- Roughly 10% of women in CAR think FGM is a religious obligation.
- FGM is prevalent in 46% of Animist women, 39% of Muslim, 36% of Protestants, and 35% of Catholic women.

Culture;

- Much like most of the countries where FGM is practiced, it is linked to a rite of passage into adulthood.
- FGM is performed partly for hygienic and aesthetic reasons as external female genitalia are considered to be dirty and unsightly.
- Removing sensitive tissue is thought to curb female sexual pleasure ensuring virginity, chastity and fidelity.
- It is thought to enhance fertility and promote child survival.

The Attitude of Men;

- In CAR, as in many countries where FGM is performed, FGM is considered to be a woman's issue, but men also contribute to its continuance.
- Men consider the subject taboo so won't talk about it, making them very hard to convince about the dangers involved.
- Many women who disagree with FGM feel they don't have enough information on the topic to convince men that the practice is harmful.
- Men exacerbate the problem by refusing to marry women who have refused to undergo the procedure.

Possible Article Titles; "How Men can help end FGM", "Why FGM doesn't increase Cleanliness"

Find More Information at;

- <http://www.path.org/files/FGM-The-Facts.htm>
- <http://www.refugeelaidinformation.org/central-african-republic-fgm>
- https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/country_profiles/Central%20African%20Republic/FGMC_CAF.pdf

Kenya

The 2014 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) estimated the national prevalence of FGM to be 21% among women age 15-49. The motivations around FGM in Kenya centre on a misconceptions of religious requirement and the need to be part of a community.

Causes of FGM in Kenya;

Religion;

- The prevalence of FGM varies between religions with most Muslim women believing it is a religious requirement.
- FGM is more prevalent in Muslim women (51.1%) and women listing no religion (32.9%) and less prevalent in Roman Catholic (21.5%) and Protestant or other Christian women (17.9%).

Culture;

- FGM is an ancient practice seen as a community requirement.
- A higher proportion of women in Kenya see FGM as required by their community, rather than required by their religion.
- People prioritise their community values and customs over the law, therefore legislation alone won't solve the problem. One Pokot traditional practitioner said, "If they arrest me, I don't care because I know I have not committed an offence but in fact helped society."
- Many women believe FGM leads to success in all aspects of life.
- Many people believe that both males and females remain children until they are cut.

Social Advantage;

- Many Kenyan communities are structured in such a way that women who haven't been circumcised are denied many crucial social benefits such as integration, marriage prospects and education.
- One villager said, "We are pleading with the government to allow us to engage in our traditional practices. It is a very big problem for our girls because if they just sit at home without being circumcised, they will not get a husband and will not be educated. They will just stay at home."

Possible Article Titles; "Cultural Beliefs on FGM in Kenya", "How to Socially Integrate those who Refuse FGM"

Find More Information at;

- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/feb/07/female-genital-mutilation-kenya-daughters-fgm>
- http://28toomany.org/media/uploads/final_kenya_country_profile_may_2013.pdf

Tanzania

In a 2015-2016 report, the prevalence rate of FGM in Tanzania was down to 10% of women aged 15-49. The reason why FGM hasn't been eradicated in Tanzania is that there is immense stigma and taboo surrounding any sexual subject. This means it is difficult to engage people in a dialogue as to why the practice is harmful. People don't want to openly discuss or consider something of a sexual nature, so the practice continues.

Causes of FGM in Tanzania;

Culture;

- The specifics of the ceremonies and rituals vary between the ethnic groups and regions, but the core is generally a rite of passage into adulthood and/or puberty ritual.
- FGM is commonly seen as necessary to uphold female virginity and fidelity, to reduce female sexual desire and promiscuity, and to promote fertility.
- Attacks against FGM are seen as attacks against cultural identity.

Stigma/Taboo;

- Stigma surrounding women who are uncut stems from the fact that the subject is so taboo.
- Women who have not undergone an FGM procedure are often discriminated against and insulted by peers.
- Some men are prohibited from marrying into families which don't practice FGM.
- Men who do marry uncut girls are seen as “doing them a favour,” and the girl is likely to be discriminated against by her in-laws.
- Girls who haven't undergone the practice are prevented from participating in many daily activities within their communities. For example, girls who have refused FGM in Tarime district are prohibited from cooking for in-laws, washing in the river with girls who have been cut and opening the doors of the cow shelters to prevent their bad luck being brought upon anyone who may enter the shelter after them.

Medicalisation;

- There is no general trend towards medicalisation in Tanzania, but in urban areas, wealthier families prefer to use healthcare professionals to perform the practice such as midwives and doctors. For example midwives in Kilimanjaro sometimes perform FGM in hospitals after delivery of the baby.
- While this decreases the negative health effects of the procedure, it also leads to a misconception that FGM within a hospital setting is harmless and acceptable.
- UNICEF and other NGOs, claim that medicalisation obscures the human rights issues surrounding FGM and prevents the development of effective and long-term solutions for ending it.
- FGM performed in a hospital also still carries also the risks of long-term health problems.
- Some of the older generation think that having the procedure performed in a hospital removes some of the meaning behind the ritual, specifically the strength needed to endure the practice.

Possible Article Titles; “How FGM in a Hospital is still Harmful”, “Why FGM should be Openly Discussed.”

Find More Information at;

- http://www.28toomany.org/media/uploads/tanzania_final_final_final.pdf
- <http://www.refworld.org/docid/48d2237c28.html>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prevalence_of_female_genital_mutilation_by_country#Tanzania

Benin

According to a 2011-12 survey, 7.3% of Benin women have been subjected to FGM. This is a decline from the 2001 survey, which reported 17%. Unlike many other African countries, there is no real correlation between the prevalence of FGM and monotheistic religious groups. Therefore FGM seems to be rooted entirely in custom and community values, rather than as a religious requirement. An elderly Muslim woman in Benin claimed ““Excision is part of our customs, but the Koran does not prescribe it as an obligation.”

Causes of FGM in Benin;

Culture;

- The main reason for the practice of FGM in Benin is respect for local culture and tradition.
- FGM is seen as part of a socialization process whereby a girl can transition into adulthood, becoming a fully-fledged member of the community.
- Some people mistakenly believe there are health benefits arising from the practice.
- It is also seen, particularly by older members of a community, as essential to ensure the faithfulness of a woman to her husband.

Social Pressure;

- One of the benefits of submitting to FGM is to alleviate the intense social pressure from peers and family members.
- There is also a lot of pressure from potential husbands and in-laws. A young girl in Benin claimed “A woman not excised before marriage has no value.”

Lack of Information;

- In rural areas the consequences of FGM are poorly understood.
- The women who carry out the practice see it as their only source of livelihood, and don't realise that there may be other ways they can find a useful place in their community.

Possible Article Titles; “Why there are no Health Benefits to FGM”, “Other ways in which Excisors can make a Living”.

Find More Information at;

- https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/eoir/legacy/2013/11/08/state_countries.pdf
- <http://www.refugeelaidinformation.org/benin-fgm>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prevalence_of_female_genital_mutilation_by_country#Benin

Togo

According to a 2014 UNICEF report, the prevalence of FGM in Togo is only 1.8% in girls aged 15-19. While in 2006 the World Health Organisation put its prevalence at 5.8% for women generally. FGM continues in Togo because it is a deeply entrenched part of the local culture.

Causes of FGM in Togo;

Culture;

- FGM is often carried out as part of a “coming of age” ceremony with gifts and festivities after the girl recovers.
- The procedure is used to test the power and self-control of young women.
- Girls who have undergone the procedure have better marriage prospects and command greater bride-wealth.
- Women who have undergone the procedure, and even more so women who perform the procedure, have greater social status and power.
- A customary belief is that to undergo the procedure one must be a virgin and that the blood of a non-virgin could blind the woman carrying out the procedure.
- The traditional view is that FGM ensures virginity, fidelity and cleanliness, however the Demographic Research Unit carried out a study in which it was found that most women believed that whether a woman would be faithful or have a strong sexual appetite depended more on that woman’s individual character than whether or not that had been excised.

Lack of Judicial Action;

- The Togolese Government has outlawed FGM and is very supportive of campaigns to end it, however, in rural areas in particular, these laws aren’t fully implemented and enforced so women don’t receive the benefit of them.
- This is partly because customary practices are favoured over the law.
- Some families come across the border from the neighbouring Burkina Faso to have the procedure performed in Dapaong, in the North of Togo. This is because the laws against FGM are more strictly enforced in Burkina Faso than Togo.

Possible Article Titles; “How Anti-FGM Laws can be Better Implemented”, “Does FGM lead to Power”

Find More Information at;

- <http://www.refworld.org/docid/46d5787d32.html>
- <http://www.refugeelaidinformation.org/togo-fgm>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prevalence_of_female_genital_mutilation_by_country#Togo

Ghana

According to the World Health Organisation, the prevalence of FGM in Ghana is only 3.8%. Attitudes towards FGM in Ghana have massively changed in recent years due to extensive awareness raising campaigns, however in some communities the practice persists. This is largely down to traditionalists who want to cling to ancestral beliefs.

Causes of FGM in Ghana;

Culture;

- FGM is seen as a cultural right by some communities and movements against it are viewed as threatening and hostile towards this right.
- It is a rite of passage in adulthood.
- It is thought to prevent promiscuity.
- Some people believe FGM prevents the death of a first born child.
- There is also a belief that the presence of a clitoris makes a woman a man.

Lack of Judicial Action;

- There have been a number of instances where FGM has been reported to the police but no governmental intervention has taken place.
- Even where police do follow up on complaints of FGM, there is still no pro-active approach to go out and find the people performing the procedures.

Possible Article Titles; What the Police can do to Prevent FGM”, “Why Anti-FGM Campaigners are not Hostile.”

Find More Information at;

- <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/fgm-in-ghana-what-local-african-organisations-are-doing-to-eliminate-female-genital-mutilation-8537898.html>
- <http://vibeghana.com/2013/09/05/female-genital-mutilation-cases-rise-in-ghana/>
- <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/Female-Genital-Mutilation-Still-Prevails-In-Ghana-338034>

Niger

According to UNICEF, in 2006 the prevalence rate of FGM in Niger was 2%, however the World Health Organisation estimates that the prevalence rate in Niger is much higher, at 20%. It is hard to get an accurate statistic for Niger because following the adoption of legislation criminalising FGM, women don't want to report that they have undergone the procedure for fear of prosecution.

Causes of FGM in Niger;

Religion;

- Some religious conservatives still believe that FGM is a requirement of their religion.

Culture;

- There is a belief that only a woman who has undergone FGM will gain social acceptance.
- Many believe being cut is more hygienic.
- Women who undergo FGM have better marriage prospects because the procedure ensures virginity.
- Some communities believe FGM should be performed for the sexual gratification of men.

Lack of Access to Justice;

- Many people in certain rural communities are ignorant to the laws which ban them from carrying out the procedure, and which protect them from it.
- There is little communication between litigants/people who complain of FGM and judicial personnel such as the police, court official and prosecutors.
- Sometimes the people campaigning against FGM find it hard to communicate with potential victims of the practice.

Possible Article Titles; “How to Improve Communication between Communities and Judicial Personnel”,
“How to Raise Awareness around FGM Laws.”

Find More Information at;

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prevalence_of_female_genital_mutilation_by_country#Niger
- <http://www.thewomenstorch.com/2017/02/07/fight-against-fgm-niger-at-the-forefront/>

Cameroon

According to a survey on FGM in 2004, the FGM prevalence rate in Cameroon was 1.4%. The national rate is relatively low, however there are regions with a high prevalence rate. For example, in the extreme north of Cameroon, the prevalence rate is 13% for the Fulbe people and people of Arab descent. FGM persists in these parts of Cameroon due to the influence of the males who generally run communities and want to maintain their dominance over the women.

Causes of FGM in Cameroon;

Culture;

- FGM is seen as an initiation into womanhood for the girls in a community.
- According to the president of a local organisation seeking to eradicate FGM, “The girls are circumcised during a special ceremony and locked in a house where they are fattened and taught to dance.”
- Some women believe the practice should be maintained because it preserves their integrity and brings a sense of pride.
- In-laws pressure young women to undergo the procedure to ensure they remain faithful.

Attitude of Men;

- Men are usually in a position of dominance within a village power structure.
- These men, particularly the village chiefs oppose campaigns against FGM because they see the practice as a key way for them to maintain power over the women.
- All women are considered to be the children of the chief’s palace just because they are born in his village.
- Men also encourage FGM to continue by refusing to marry women who have not undergone the procedure.

Possible Article Titles; “Why Men should Oppose FGM” “How Men can Help Eradicate FGM”

Find More Information at;

- <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/2547503.stm>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prevalence_of_female_genital_mutilation_by_country#Cameroon

Uganda

The estimated prevalence of FGM in Uganda is 1.4% among women aged 15-49 years old. The practice of FGM persists in Uganda because of the patriarchal nature of society and taboos around the subjects of sex and violence.

Causes of FGM in Uganda;

Culture;

- Due to the patriarchal nature of Ugandan communities, there are restrictions on women and their behaviour.
- In some Ugandan communities it is thought that a woman’s primary purpose is to ensure the sexual pleasure of her husband, and undergoing FGM is a key way of doing so.
- Due to the fact that women are often dependent on their fathers or husbands, they will do what is expected of them by these family members.
- As with most African countries, in Uganda FGM is a rite of passage ensuring fidelity, chastity and marriageability.
- People see nothing wrong with the practice because they believe it has been sanctioned by their ancestors

Stigma/Taboo;

- As in many African countries, sex and sexuality are taboo subjects in Uganda, and women who openly discuss them are considered immoral or promiscuous.
- This means it can be difficult to persuade people to abandon FGM, as they don’t want to engage in a conversation about it at all.
- In some regions, women who haven’t been cut are excluded from community activities. For example, uncut women are not allowed to milk cows as it is believed that they will contaminate the milk if they do.

Possible Article Titles; “Why Women should be treated with as much Respect as Men”, “Why it is OK to talk about Sex”.

Find More Information at;

- <http://28toomany.org/media/uploads/UgandaFinal.pdf>

Religion and FGM

In many countries FGM is justified in the basis that it is a religious obligation, however it is mentioned nowhere in the Bible or Qur'an. This makes it hard to understand how FGM could be rooted in religion, particularly when the mutilation of healthy tissue would seem to be contrary to most religious teachings.

Islam

FGM is found mostly in or near Muslim communities in Central North Africa, however it is not required by Islam, nor is it practiced in most Muslim countries. FGM is not referred to in the Qur'an, however some Muslims justify it on the basis that it is mentioned in some other Islamic texts. In these texts the practice is referred to as khafd or khitan. The latter usually refers solely to male circumcision but in some dialects and regions it can also encompass FGM. There is also reference to Sunna circumcision which is what the World Health Organisation refers to as Type I FGM. There is no consensus as to whether the hadiths support or forbid FGM and different schools of Islamic jurisprudence have expressed different views on the matter.

Sunni Collections

There are several hadiths in the Sunni collection which could be interpreted to suggest that FGM is optional, honourable, or even obligatory;

- *A woman used to perform circumcision in Medina. The Prophet said to her: Do not cut severely as that is better for a woman and more desirable for a husband.* (Sunan Abu Dawood, 41:5251)- However this has been said to have poor authenticity.

- *The Messenger of Allah said: When anyone sits amidst four parts (of the woman) and the circumcised parts touch each other a bath becomes obligatory.* (Sahih Muslim, 3:684)- Islamic thinker Mohammad Salim al-Awa claims that this is not evidence of support for FGM because reference to "the circumcised parts" in fact only means the male circumcised organ. He suggests this hadith is misunderstood because "in Arabic language, two things or persons may be given one quality or name that belongs only to one of them."

- *She said, "When the circumcised part passes the circumcised part ghusl is obligatory".* (Al-Muwatta, 2 19.75)- Again Islamic scholars have questioned whether the circumcised parts mentioned refers to only the male circumcised parts.

- *I heard the Prophet saying. "Five practices are characteristics of the Fitra: circumcision, shaving the pubic hair, cutting the moustaches short, clipping the nails, and depilating the hair of the armpits."* (Sahih al-Bukhari, 7:72:779) – As this hadith doesn't specify gender, some interpret as claiming circumcision is obligatory for both males and females, but as Mohamed Salim Al-Awwa points out, the reference to cutting a moustache suggests it applies only to men.

- There have also been a number of Sunni fatwas (religious declarations of opinion) from Islamic scholars and leader, refusing to denounce FGM and suggesting it should continue.

Shia Views

Some Shiite religious texts suggest FGM is a noble act for a girl to undertake;

- *“Circumcision is makrumah for women”*. (Tehran 34-37)- Makrumah is usually translated as “meritorious action or noble deed, but something that is not religiously obligatory.”

- There have also been Shia fatwas in support of FGM. For example Ayatollah Khamenei declared FGM as permissible but not obligatory. He also said that if the husband of a Muslim woman wants her to get circumcised then, “(the) implementation of husband's order is obligatory for the wife if it does not have disadvantages or it is not harmful for the wife, she has to listen to her husband's request.”

However in recent years, many Islamic scholars and leaders in countries where FGM is practiced have come together to denounce the practice as harmful and prohibited by religion. For example in Mauritania 34 Islamic scholars signed a fatwa banning the practice in January 2010. Their aim was to prevent people from citing religion as a justification for genital mutilation.

Christianity

It is widely agreed by Christian authorities that FGM has no foundation anywhere in any of the Christian texts or literature. However FGM is practiced among some Christian groups for example in Nigeria, Tanzania and Kenya, and is even thought of by some as a religious obligation. The reason why some may view it as a Christian obligation, is based entirely on a misunderstanding, and potentially because cultural views on the practice have become so deeply entrenched that there are now mistakenly incorporated into religious views. The misconception of FGM as a religious obligation may also stem from the importance female sexual purity plays in some Christian communities. They may believe that purity is an obligation, and if FGM ensures sexual purity, then it too must be an obligation.

Find More Information at;

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_views_on_female_genital_mutilation