

Interventions to reduce female genital mutilation/cutting affect attitudes, not practices



What is the aim of this review?

This Campbell systematic review examines the empirical research on the effectiveness of FGM/C interventions to reduce the occurrence of FGM/C practices. The review also examines the empirical research on contextual factors that may help explain the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of such interventions. It summarises findings from 8 effectiveness studies and 27 context studies conducted in seven different African countries: Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Somalia/Kenya, Mali, Nigeria and Senegal.

Girls exposed to female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) are at risk of both immediate adverse physical consequences as well as long-term health consequences. The assessment of the effectiveness of interventions to reduce the prevalence of FGM/C is hampered by a lack of rigorous evidence.

What did the review study?

Female genital mutilation/cutting is a traditional practice that involves the partial or total removal or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It is mainly rooted in religio-social beliefs and carried out mainly in 28 countries in Africa on prepubescent girls.

FGM/C interventions aim to reduce the occurrence of FGM/C among practicing communities. This review examines the empirical research on the effectiveness of FGM/C interventions. The review also examines the contextual factors that may help explain the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of such interventions.

What studies are included?

Included studies reported on any interventions aimed at preventing, or reducing the prevalence of FGM/C with girls and/or young women at risk of FGM/C. Studies reporting interventions targeting members of communities practicing FGM/C such as religious leaders and traditional circumcisers as participants were also included. Effectiveness studies had to employ a controlled before-and-after study design.

The studies were conducted in Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Somalia/Kenya, Mali, Nigeria and Senegal.

The context studies adopted both qualitative and cross sectional quantitative study designs. A total of eight effectiveness studies and 27 context studies with 7,042 participants were included in the review.



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How up-to-date is this review?

The review authors searched for studies published until March 2011. This Campbell Systematic Review was published in June 2012.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?

The Campbell Collaboration is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary

This summary was prepared by Ada Chukwudozie (Campbell Collaboration) based on the Campbell Systematic Review 2012:9 Interventions to reduce the prevalence of female genital mutilation/cutting in African countries by Rigmor C. Berg and Eva Denison. (DOI 10.4073/csr.2012:9). Copy-editing and layout was done by Tanya Kristiansen (Campbell Collaboration). Financial support from the American Institutes for Research for the production of this summary is gratefully acknowledged.



Interventions to encourage the abandonment of female genital mutilation/cutting have positive effects on attitudes, but not on practices.

What are the main results in this review?

Interventions to encourage the abandonment of FGM/C have positive effects on attitudes, but limited effects were found on the practice of FGM/C itself. The limited effects may be due to weak program intensity, implementation problems, and an insufficient number of study participant to detect changes.

The main factors that supported FGM/C were tradition, religion, and reduction of women's sexual desire. The main factors that hindered FGM/C were medical complications and prevention of sexual satisfaction.

What do the findings in this review mean?

The eight effectiveness studies which were included in the review had low methodological quality. But while there is doubt as to the validity of the findings, the results point to changes in attitudes. Thus, there is a need to conduct methodologically rigorous evaluations of effectiveness.

