

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION: A DANISH PROBLEM?



Source 1: Photo by UK Department for International Development

During the Spring of 2018, I focused my university semester project on Female Genital Mutilation, otherwise referred to as FGM. Initially, I thought that I would examine one of the 28 African countries that were displayed on the [28 Too Many](#) website where FGM is predominantly practiced, however the more research I did, the more I began to realize that FGM is not an issue that solely resides on the African continent. On the contrary, I discovered that FGM is a transnational issue. Globalization has accelerated migration across all corners of the globe, and with it, various practices, too. [According to a 2014 report from Danmarks Statistik, there are 20,000 girls at risk of FGM in Denmark.](#)

There is so little research done on FGM within Denmark, and Europe in general, that accurate statistics are hard to come by, which delegitimizes the issue and makes it difficult to acknowledge and confront. Therefore, it is highly necessary to do more research on transnational FGM as it is a substantial concern among numerous populations in Europe, and throughout the Global North. It is, furthermore,

important to also engage in advocacy work and call for a greater focus on FGM as a transnational issue, too. This article is a brief summary of a research paper I co-wrote as my Bachelors Thesis in 2019 at [Aalborg University](#) on the status of FGM in Denmark, with a focus on the health care system.

Female Genital Mutilation in Denmark

In Denmark, the practice of FGM became illegal in 2003, and those who commit the crime are punishable with a six-year sentence. In Europe, the growing initiative to persecute those who commit FGM related crimes has resulted in over 40 European court cases, while [five individuals in Denmark have been charged.](#) Like other European countries, Denmark is an immigration destination which, in the vein of transnationalism, creates two spheres in which the immigrant lives: one in which practices like FGM are a norm, another in which they are illegal. [The H. C. Andersen Children hospital has inspected at least 6-7 girls with suspicion of FGM practices while several](#)

[hundred women have been inspected due to complications from being mutilated.](#)

In Denmark, there are few known cases of FGM. However, the practice is still present due to immigration from countries where it is a norm. Some immigrants, from FGM practicing countries such as Somalia, believe that the practice needs to be maintained, even though they are currently living in [Denmark, where the practice is illegal under EU law](#). According to [Hansen](#), most healthcare professionals in Denmark only knowingly encounter FGM patients when the mother is giving birth, however [Ledegaard](#) has stressed that instances have also occurred where Danish girls, with Somali ethnicity, have been forced to go to one of the aforementioned 28 African countries to undergo FGM. This is a complex issue as these girls are considered, legally speaking, Danish, but are then cut on another state's territory. Therefore, there are legal limits as to what can lawfully be done to protect them.

The official position of the Danish government on the practice of FGM is presented in the information material on FGM released, jointly by three Danish ministries. [This article](#) introduces FGM by pointing out its illegality in Denmark and the fact that the practice itself is a violation of the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), which Denmark ratified in 1991. Herein, it is pointed out that FGM is not an acceptable practice in the Danish society, and despite it being a cultural value and heritage in various societies on the basis on 2000 years of tradition, the practice is declared completely incompatible with the Danish views on humanity. The article firmly announces that the practice must be eradicated and that the progress seen amongst migrants in Denmark, who choose to shun the practice, must not be equated with a solution to the problem. The fact that FGM is continuously practiced is acknowledged, and therefore, the article believes that the various professionals who work with girls and women must continue to combat the problem, as "we all have a responsibility to the girls who have been exposed and who are at risk of FGM".

What is the understanding and treatment of FGM in the Danish healthcare system?

Ultimately, FGM is an issue deeply concerned with healthcare. My research, along with my peers Nahida Vasie and Diana M. Kristensensen, has found that in

Denmark, municipalities and regions are tasked with making their own plan for the prevention and treatment of FGM, as the state advises against a general top-down plan. The Ministries behind the FGM reference work for public workers suggest a focus on providing information on the practice, such as complications and risk as a result of FGM and its illegality in Denmark to the target groups, along with caring for victims post-FGM. The municipal healthcare is primarily concerned with the preventative measures and some of the curative care of victims, while the regional healthcare is responsible for curative care of FGM patients in need of specialized treatment, such as gynecology and pregnancy care. On the other hand, a report by [Christoffersen et al.](#) has found that few of the Danish municipalities have implemented a plan of action for the cases of FGM.

The Importance of Advocacy

In large part, the Danish society does not view FGM as a Danish problem. This is reflected in the poor implementation of the government, and especially the Danish health care system, in dealing with FGM. Therefore, advocacy is so important to raise awareness on the issue. A prominent advocate from the United Kingdom, Ms. Hibo Wardere, is championing the fight against FGM in the UK. Wardere came to Denmark and gave an incredibly informative and powerful talk to [The United Nations Youth Association, Denmark](#) in the same Spring of 2018, after I reached out to her about my research project. After informing her about the status of FGM in Denmark, we started organizing an event that came into fruition. During Wardere's presentation, we learned that there were many parallels between the UK and Denmark, in regard to transnational FGM, as there are many diasporas that reside in the nations from 'official' FGM practicing countries in Africa. To read further about the event, as well as Ms. Hibo Wardere's take of FGM and the practice itself, you can read [this article](#).

Ms. Wardere is an inspirational figure in the fight against FGM in the UK, where she has made significant strides in educating schools, the police force, members of government and the general public about the dangers of FGM to young girls and women within her community. Wardere has also travelled to Canada, France and around the United Kingdom to spread awareness on this issue and has further written a [book](#) that has been translated into several languages. In Denmark, there is still little awareness of FGM as a Danish issue, as NGO's, such as the [Orchid Project](#),

mainly work within the 28 African countries where it is practiced at a larger scale.

This is just an account of the Danish case. It is not a stand-alone case, as many other European countries share similar, if not worse, dynamics when it comes to preventing and treating FGM. In order to tackle a problem, it first needs to be seen as a relevant problem, which it is currently not in the Global North. Diasporas of people from countries that predominantly practise FGM are part of European, American and Australian Societies and have been for several generations. Their problems are our problems, and we need to solve them together.

Lastly, I Would like to thank and give credit to my project group mates, [Nahida Vasie](#) and [Diana M. Kristensen](#), as well as our supervisor, [Kirsten Jæger](#), for working with me and supporting me in my research on transnational FGM. These findings would not be possible without any of you. If anyone is interested in further reading or discussion on this issue, you can contact me [here](#).

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Publicado por:



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