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Toolkits to help women who have experienced or are at risk of female genital cutting: A review

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Background and Research Question

In recent years, written guidance and other tools to assist professionals in multiple sectors have been issued to increase their awareness about female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), knowledge of how to respond appropriately, and means of delivering optimal care to women who have undergone FGM/C.

A long-standing human rights-framed issue, FGM/C is a global health concern and is most often carried out on young girls. Apart from practicing origin countries, increased international migration has given rise to FGM/C in countries in the Americas, Europe, and Oceania, and compelled domestic legislation to outlaw FGM/C.

We sought to identify and assess the scope of web-based toolkits available regarding FGM/C, aimed at providing information about the practice and how professionals should communicate with affected women and girls.

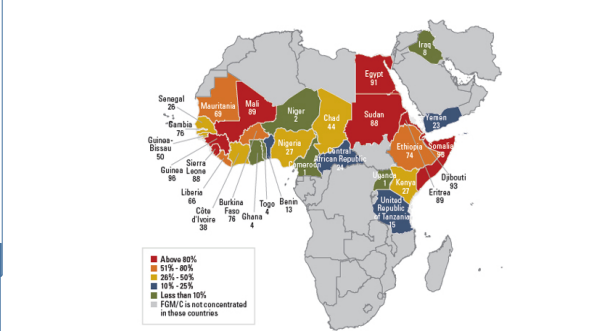
Methodology

This review sought to examine Internet-accessible toolkits. The word "toolkit" may include a variety of educational materials, such as operational guidance, risk assessment or screening templates, instruction sheets, literature reviews, and training videos.

Toolkits were identified using the following search terms in Google, with no limit on date published:

- FGM online resources in other countries
- Toolkits FGM survivors and health care professionals

Each toolkit was assessed as to the country of origin, date of issuance, distribution format, target audience, content, and research evidence underlying the content.



Percentage of girls and women ages 15 to 49 who have undergone FGM, by country. Source: UNICEF, 2013. Cited in one of our identified toolkits, Canada's guide for health professionals working with immigrant and refugee children and youth.



A training led by the Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development (FORWARD), a UK-based accredited training provider on FGM/C and registered charity.

Results

A total of 45 toolkits were included in the initial review. Evaluation of these toolkits found 31 were geared toward health care professionals. One was also geared toward women who have experienced FGM/C.

The majority of the toolkits were produced outside the United States. Toolkits were issued by international organizations, such as the World Health Organization, United Nations Population Fund, and United Nations Development Programme.

Additionally, non-governmental organizations and government agencies in many countries issued toolkits, including Canada, the United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Belgium, Australia, New Zealand, and Kenya. Three toolkits were identified in journal articles.

The toolkits were found to be variable in quality of content and timeliness of information presented. Generally, they were found to communicate epidemiological and legal information pertaining to FGM/C, but lack the provision of skills development or a presentation of evidence-based practices in working with women and girls who have undergone FGM/C.

Future Directions

Future directions include building skills development and tools that can be used by health care providers to ensure effective best practices are implemented when working with women and girls who have experienced FGM/C.

Given the use of toolkits to disseminate health information and inform/change care practices regarding FGM/C, but the lack of validated tools, future directions also include advancing toolkits supported by research evidence, which was not the case for all toolkits assessed in this review.

Some of the identified toolkits discuss or offer:

- Background regarding FGM/C, including global prevalence and where it is practiced;
- Applicable law on FGM/C;
- The different types of FGM/C in accord with World Health Organization classifications;
- Recommended screening questions for patients;
- Suggested guidelines for culturally competent care;
- Immediate and long-term health complications from FGM/C, including psychosocial issues and sexual impact; and
- A list of selected resources.

Discussion

While some of the toolkits addressed prevention efforts in connection with FGM/C, others aimed to inform care practices for affected women and girls in accord with applicable law.

None of the identified toolkits included an evaluation of their effectiveness as a strategy, in connection with implementation or clinical outcomes. However, a few included literature reviews, an evidence-based approach to discussing FGM/C in the clinical setting, and recommendations and best practice statements based on evidence.

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