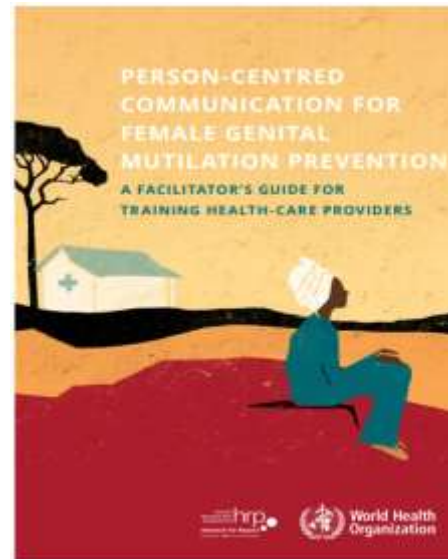


## Module 2 – Session 3

# Values and ethics on FGM medicalization



## Learning objectives

- ✓ To understand why FGM medicalization should never be done
  - To be aware of the ethical standards that health-care providers need to abide by
  - To be aware of the existing laws on FGM within each participant's countries
- ✓ To know how to respond to requests for FGM medicalization



# Presentation outline

- FGM medicalization refresher
- Professional code of ethics
- Know FGM legal status in your country
- How to respond to FGM medicalization requests
- Summary

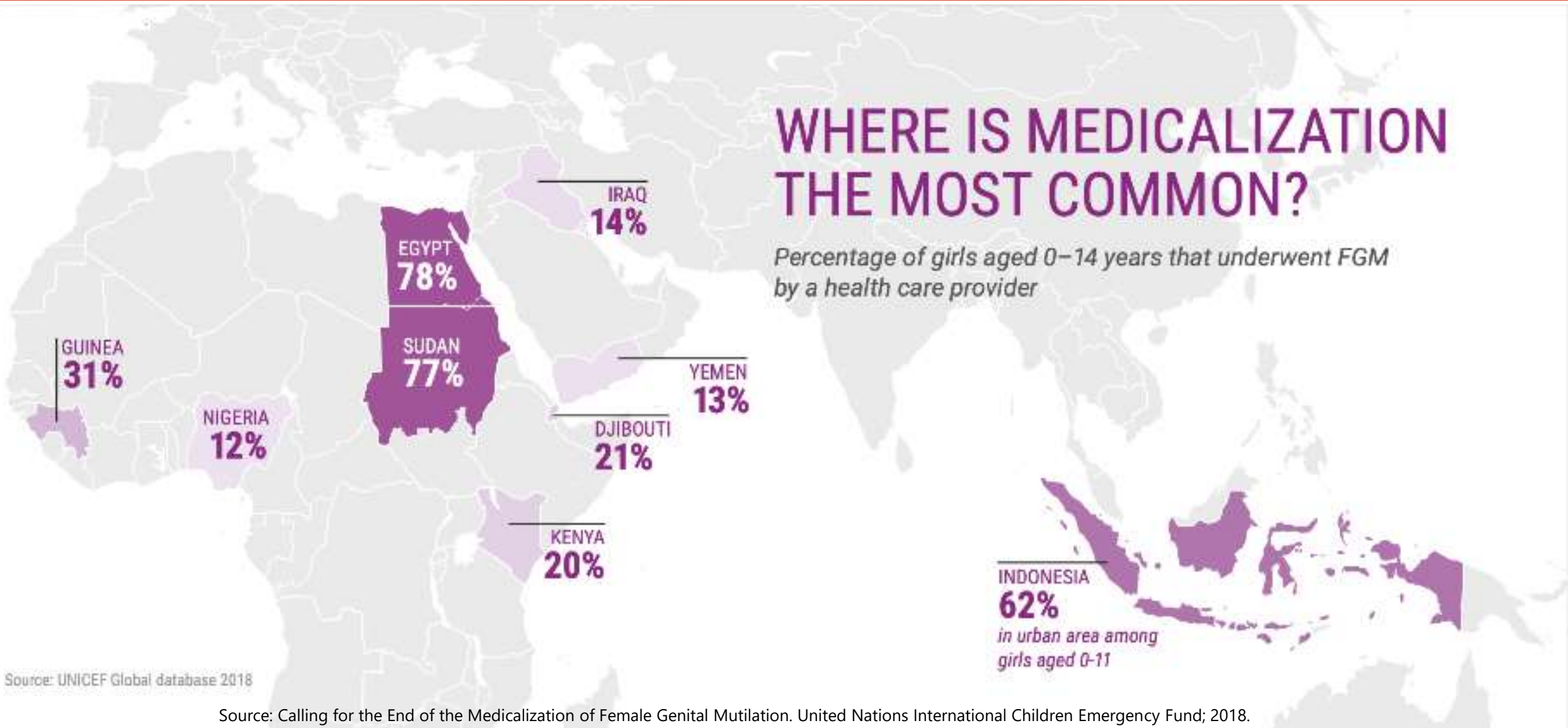


# What is FGM medicalization?

- Situations in which FGM is practiced by **any category of health-care provider** whether in a **public** or a **private clinic**, at **home** or elsewhere
- It also **includes** the procedure of **re-infibulation** (FGM type 3) at any point in time in a woman's life



# Prevalence of FGM medicalization



# Motivations for FGM medicalization

- Health care providers are often members of societies in which FGM is part of the cultural norm
- Some believe there are benefits of FGM
- To satisfy the demands of the community
- For financial benefits
- For harm reduction (vs FGM done by traditional circumciser)
- Not forbidden by the law (in some countries)



# Professional ethics

- Professional ethics are principles that **guide the behavior of professionals**
  - e.g., confidentiality, respect
- Ethics are distinct from laws: Ethics are **not based on laws, and need to be respected and upheld**
- Medical professional bodies are responsible to maintain the ethical standards of each profession



# Medical ethical code of “doing no harm”

- The welfare and wellbeing of every patient is most important
- Not to inflict undue harm intentionally or through negligence

***FGM performed by a health-care provider violates two basic principles:***

- ✓ ***Doing no harm***
- ✓ ***Serving the best interests of the patient and promoting their well-being***





# Example of code of ethics set by the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) (1)

- **ICM STATEMENT:** “The role of the midwife is to improve the standard of care provided to women, babies and families throughout the world”
  - This means that midwives care for women, not harm them as the case for FGM medicalization
- **ICM STATEMENT:** “Midwives provide care for women & childbearing families with respect for cultural diversity **while also working to eliminate harmful practices:**
  - Midwives are supposed to actively work to prevent FGM and therefore not be involved in the practice



# Example of code of ethics set by the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) (2)

- **ICM STATEMENT:** “Midwives understand the adverse consequences that ethical and human rights violations have on the health of women and infants, and will work to eliminate these violations”:
  - FGM is a harmful practice with no health benefits and violates several human rights
- **ICM STATEMENT:** “Midwives act as effective role models of health promotion for women throughout their life cycle, for families and for other health care providers”:
  - FGM can impact health across women’s life course and important for midwives to promote health to women, families and other health workers



# Example of code of ethics set by the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) (3)

- **ICM STATEMENT:** “Midwives are responsible for their decisions and actions, and are **accountable** for the related outcomes in their care of women”:
  - If a midwife agrees to do FGM, she can be held accountable and sanctioned. She could even lose her midwifery practice license

***FGM performed by midwives violates ICM’s code of ethics as FGM is harmful to health and violates several human rights.***



# What does your professional code of conduct have?

- If you are a nurse, clinical officer, medical assistant, medical doctor, specialist (pediatrics, obstetrician and gynecologist) what code of ethics matches ICM's?
- Does your code of ethics have a specific clause on FGM medicalization?
- What are the penalties for malpractice and/or for FGM medicalization?



# The legal status on FGM

- FGM is illegal (criminal offence) in most countries
- Laws against FGM practice support justification why FGM should not be practiced by health care providers and others



Country Profiles

Continent Profiles

Thematic Research



<https://www.28toomany.org/>

# Know the FGM related legal status in your country

- What laws are in place at national or subnational level?
  - Are these laws part of the children's protection act?
- When were these laws issued?
- What are the penalties for health-care providers who practice FGM?
- Are health-care providers enforcers of the law? – If they suspect a girl will be cut, must they report? – Do they only report if the girl has already been

cut?



# Responding to requests for medicalized FGM (1)

Reason	Example answer
<b>False belief about lesser harm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “FGM is never a safe procedure. It has no health benefits.”</li><li>• “The ‘doing less harm’ argument is not valid as health-care providers should ‘do no harm’.”</li></ul>
<b>Law</b>	“Unfortunately, I cannot accept your request. FGM is illegal in this country. No one should perform FGM and those who perform it will get into serious trouble with the authorities.”
<b>Professional ethics</b>	“As a health-care provider, my role is to provide the best possible care to my patients and do no harm. FGM is harmful with long lasting effects. By doing FGM, I would be harming.”



## Responding to requests for medicalized FGM (2)

Reason	Example answer
<b>Health reasons</b>	“FGM can seriously affect health and in some cases can lead to death. As a health-care provider my duty is to improve wellbeing and I cannot do otherwise”
<b>Human rights/ rights of the child</b>	“FGM violates several human rights which goes against our duty as health-care providers to ensure the right to health, the right to life and children’s rights.”

*Using a person-centred approach, health-care providers should **respectfully decline** a request for cutting a girl by trying to understand the patient’s point of view and responding with an alternative argument*





# Summary

- FGM medicalization is when FGM (including re-infibulation) is performed by health-care providers
- FGM violates all health professional code of ethics
- FGM violates laws in most countries
- Know your professional code of ethics clauses that relate to FGM and legal situation on FGM
- Respectfully use a person-centered approach in communication to decline FGM medicalization requests



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