

## Country: The Gambia

**Population:** 1.8 million

**Estimated prevalence among women aged 15-49:** 78.3%

Data Source	15 – 49 (%)	15 - 19	35 - 39	Urban	Rural	Lowest Region	Highest Region	Nicked, no flesh removed	Flesh removed	Sewn closed	Medically performed	National law
MICS 2005/06	78.3	79.9	79.5	72.2	82.8	44.8	99.0	---	---	---	---	No laws

PRB 2010

### Type practised:

The most widely practiced form is **Type II** (commonly known as excision).

### Legal status:

There is no law in the Gambia that specifically outlaws the practice of FGC. To date, there have been no court cases concerning this issue.

### History of FGC in the Gambia:

FGC is known to have been performed on young girls before the birth of Islam or Christianity and cuts across cultural and religious lines. In the Gambia, the practice of FGC has traditionally been conducted in a context of secrecy, and excision is seen as giving power to girls in their rite of passage into womanhood.

### Current efforts to abandon FGC:

Tostan is one organisation working to end FGC in the Gambia. Tostan has been operating its Community Empowerment Programme (CEP), a three-year, nonformal, rights-based education programme, in eight African countries since 1991. The programme was launched in the Gambia in 2007 in partnership with UNICEF in over 150 rural communities to develop awareness of human rights and spark productive discussion on harmful traditional practices such as FGC. To date, 127 communities in the Gambia have declared abandonment of FGC as a result of the Tostan programme. Tostan continues its efforts in the country, currently working in about 115 communities.

The Gambia Committee against Traditional Practices (GAMCOTRAP) is another initiative that aims to raise awareness about the harmful effects of traditional practices such as FGC. It has organised training workshops and programmes, including video viewing, to provide information on the harmful effects of this practice. It is also developing new strategies to provide cutters with alternate ways of earning a living. Workshops held during a women's week in The Gambia reached at least 5000 women. Lectures are held around the country to reach the entire populace. As a result, the once taboo subject is now openly discussed.

A Symposium for Religious Leaders and Medical Personnel on FGC as a Form of Violence was organised by GAMCOTRAP. This resulted in the Banjul Declaration of July 22, 1998, which declared that the practice has neither Islamic nor Christian origins nor justifications and condemned its continuation.

BAFROW (Foundation for Research on Women's Health, Productivity & Development) was established in 1991 to carry out projects and research in the health and environment areas. BAFROW aims to eradicate

FGC while respecting the importance of the social and cultural traditions associated with the rites of passage to womanhood. It helps communities develop alternative rites of passage that emphasise girls' rights as individuals, their health, religious education and community responsibilities ("*initiation without mutilation*").

### Ongoing challenges:

There is a vested interest in continuing this practice in The Gambia. Many of the cutters are traditional practitioners or trained health attendants. They supplement their income with the money and other articles they receive from work as cutters. In fact, the income they earn from performing this procedure is often higher than what they earn as midwives or nurses. Their social status also improves as a cutter.

In 1999 President Jammeh announced that The Gambia would not ban these practices. He also stated that FGC was part of Gambian culture. Several members of the National Assembly and the Supreme Islamic Council have publicly supported continuation of FGC. The Vice President, on the other hand, has voiced support for reform.

### Additional information:

One of the results of the extensive outreach efforts in the country has been that the topic is now an issue that concerned Gambians are willing to address publicly. Articles regularly appear in the local papers and opposing views on the subject are debated in editorials and letters to the editors.

However, unlike many African countries, the percentage of women age 15-19 that have undergone FGC (79.9%) is actually slightly higher than the percentage of women age 35-39, which stands at 79.5%. This stands in contrast to the general pattern of decline (to varying extents) in FGC that has been documented across most of Africa.

### Practising Ethnic groups:

Mandinka 98%  
Fula/Peul 32%  
Wolof 4%  
Diola  
Sarahule  
Serer  
Aku  
Marabout  
Tilibonka  
Karonika

### Languages:

English (official)  
Mandinka  
Wolof  
Pulaar

### Major religions:

Islam 90%  
Christian 8%  
Indigenous beliefs 2%

### Resources:

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/country\\_profiles/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/country_profiles/default.stm)  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>  
<http://2001-2009.state.gov/g/wi/rls/rep/crfgm/10099.htm>

<http://www.accessgambia.com/information/female-circumcision-fgm.html>

[http://www.unicef.org/wcaro/wcaro\\_gambia\\_FGM\\_Desk\\_Review.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/wcaro/wcaro_gambia_FGM_Desk_Review.pdf)