

## Table of Contents

- ***THL: 10,000 girls and women in Finland have undergone FGM***

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***Finland's public health watchdog THL says 3,000 girls risk undergoing the procedure, which involves removal of all or some of the external female genitalia.***

UUTISET (23.11.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2SexElb> - There are currently as many as 3,000 girls in Finland who face the risk of being subjected to female genital mutilation or FGM, according to an analysis released by the National Institute for Health and Welfare on Friday.

The THL data indicate that more than 10,000 girls and women resident in Finland have undergone the procedure. FGM is mostly carried out on young girls between infancy and the age of 15, according to the World Health Organisation.

"In addition there are another estimated 650 to 3,000 girls living in Finland who are at risk of circumcision," said THL specialist Mimmi Koukkula of the agency's children and families unit. However she noted that officials do not believe girls have had the procedure carried out in Finland, rather they have been sent abroad for it.

"The large variation in [the estimate] comes from the assumption that members of second-generation [immigrant] groups are not circumcised or that circumcision is as common [in this group] as in the previous generation in the country of origin," Koukkula added.

According to the Finnish League for Human Rights FGM is practiced in many African countries, as well as in parts of the Middle East and Asia. As a result of migration, the custom has spread to countries where it was not previously practiced.

The NGO said that the majority of FGM cases in Finland occur among communities originally from Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Kurdish regions.

### ***Important to grasp scope of problem***

So far, Finnish authorities have not systematically gathered any data on FGM on women and girls in the country.

"However we need to gather data because it is important to recognise the scope of the phenomenon in order to address it," Koukkula noted.

Finland has attempted to improve data gathering by measures such as adding a section in maternal health care cards asking whether the expectant mother's genitals have been circumcised.

“So we ask pregnant women about this in the maternity clinic and the information on the card is also passed on to the maternity hospital. The hospital collects information about the mothers who have been circumcised and who have had an FGM reversal into a database,” Koukkula explained.

The THL specialist said that more data will also be collected in future. “Finland is currently collecting information on circumcision of women and girls from research on two different groups of foreign-background women.”

She noted that in addition, information on FGM and reversal procedures are being gathered into a separate database and added that a nationwide school health survey will also include a question about FGM.

THL said that it plans to provide online multicultural customer service training relating to health and social care professionals. The material will provide practical information about issues such as individuals facing the threat of female circumcision or how to deal with young women who have undergone the procedure, as well as a duty to notify officials and existing regulations.

### ***Trainee midwife calls for practical experience***

Midwifery student Ulla Karhu, who studies at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, said that current practical studies about how to deal with FGM is still too theoretical.

“Midwifery studies offer only a few hours of study about what to do when a woman who has been circumcised comes in to give birth. Whether or not we encounter such situations during training is entirely up to chance,” Karhu said.

She pointed out that in labour the lives of both mother and child hang in the balance so it is important for midwives to know what to do. She called for two changes to midwifery studies.

“Our training should include more contact hours to give [us] a feel for how to act and to choose our language when we meet a mother-to-be who has circumcised genitals. In this way we would avoid situations in which a midwife sees a circumcised woman for the first time when labour has already begun,” Karhu said.

Karhu said that her studies have taught her that FGM is performed differently in different countries and cultures by either cutting or cauterising the clitoris has been removed and the labia have been removed and sutured so as to leave only a small opening for urinating and menstruation. This means that a reversal procedure is necessary for childbirth, she added.

“The law obliges a midwife to maintain her professional skills, but that is impossible without practical experience. For example in cases where midwives may have been trained decades ago and it is rare to come across a woman who has been circumcised.”