

POLICY NOTE

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/CUTTING AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Strengthening the policy linkages between
different forms of violence



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**ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN SECTION**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Violence against women and girls manifests in different forms. These include intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, sexual exploitation and trafficking, and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and child, early and forced marriage, among others. Programmes to end harmful practices, and programmes to end intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence (widely referred to as violence against women and girls, VAWG) are often planned and implemented separately. While this is intended so programmes can be tailored accordingly, it can result in isolation of initiatives that would otherwise benefit from sharing of knowledge and good practices and, from strategic, coordinated efforts.

Both FGM/C and VAWG interventions are guided by common international and regional norms and standards as described in a number of human rights legal and policy agreements. This can serve as an important entry point for better aligned and coordinated work, underpinned by a human rights-based approach (see Annex 1 for a listing of key conventions, declarations and agreements on violence against women and girls).

Article 2 of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) promotes the principle of non-discrimination against women and girls, as a key principle for a human rights-based approach to address all forms of violence against women and girls, including harmful practices such as FGM/C. Furthermore, other international and regional agreed documents at times address VAWG and FGM/C together. Regional conventions such as the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Right of Women in Africa* (the Maputo Protocol) and the *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence* (the Istanbul Convention) are examples of human rights instruments that address both VAWG and FGM/C. Worth noting is also the 2014 *United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and Committee on the Rights of the Child Joint General Recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/ General comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices*. The most recent example is

the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which includes under Goal 5: *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*, targets for both elimination of all harmful practices (5.3) and elimination of all forms of violence against all women and girls (5.2). This reinforces the fact that both VAWG and FGM/C have some common underlying causes that would greatly benefit from common strategies to eliminate them. This can be done in part through increased co-ordination and collaboration between different actors working to end VAWG and FGM/C.

The common root causes between FGM/C and intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence include gender inequality perpetuated by patriarchal structures, and the unequal distribution of power between men and women, upheld by social norms and oftentimes by government structures.¹ It is important to consider however, how different forms of violence have evolved differently over time due to local or national influences and culturally-specific factors. Consequently, in working to end violence against women and girls generally, alongside common challenges that can be addressed through coordinated efforts, there are also varied risk factors, social dynamics and norms, that require tailored approaches. Such differences in approaches to end FGM/C and VAWG

¹ United Nations General Assembly. 1993. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ViolenceAgainstWomen.aspx>

are evident for example, in the use of different terminology to refer to similar concepts, particularly in the area of prevention.²

As an overall policy and programming consideration, there is a distinction between forms of violence against women and girls where there is intention to inflict harm, and others like FGM/C where the underlying rationale for the practice is based on social acceptance and inclusion of girls and the avoidance of social stigma. Also worth noting is that FGM/C differs from intimate partner violence in that women are not

only those subjected to violence, but are also often the ones who inflict it or ensure it occurs.

It is therefore critically important to analyze the cultural, religious and social context where VAWG and FGM/C interventions are planned. It is also important to identify both specific risk factors and social dynamics that are conducive to each form of violence, as well as those that are common to all forms of violence to move forward more comprehensive change in social norms.

² The issue of different terminologies is discussed in more detail in the background paper that accompanies this document.

2. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

In 2015, UN Women and the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting commissioned a background paper to explore policy issues common to FGM/C and VAWG initiatives, and to identify potential synergies and lessons from experiences at the global, regional and national levels. That background paper, *Finding Convergence in Policy Frameworks: A Background Paper on the Policy Links between Gender, Violence against Women and Girls, and FGM/C*, informs this document. This paper further explores legislative, policy and programming inter-linkages and considers entry points for increased coordination and collaboration to advance the objectives of ending both FGM/C and VAWG.³

Both documents are intended for multiple audiences including those directly involved in policy development, planning and implementing initiatives, those providing technical support, and advocates for ending all forms of violence against women and girls, including FGM/C.

This paper presents a policy-focused analysis and a set of policy considerations and recommendations based on the background paper mentioned above. It is intended to provide a basis for discussion within and between development agencies, governments and civil society about how to address, in more coordinated and effective ways, the factors that drive the perpetuation of FGM/C and VAWG, within the context of more broadly addressing gender inequality and

gender-based discrimination against women and girls.

Section Three examines how addressing different forms of violence through separate interventions has resulted in some common and some distinct policy and programme approaches, specifically in the areas of: strengthening national legal and policy frameworks; prevention strategies; care for the women and girls who have been subjected to violence; and building data and evidence. Areas for potential collaboration between VAWG and FGM/C initiatives are suggested throughout the section.

Section Four offers a brief conclusion.

³ More information about the information sources, search keywords and methods used for the background paper, can be found in the paper itself, which accompanies this document.

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