

Critical Intersections of FGM/C: The Value of Intersectionality in Cross-Collaboration

Mixed Methods findings from Sahiyo's original research



Origin

Sahiyo was formed in 2015 as an advocacy collective of South Asian and other survivors of female genital cutting (FGC) to address the lack of acknowledgment around FGC as a global form of gender-based violence and child abuse.

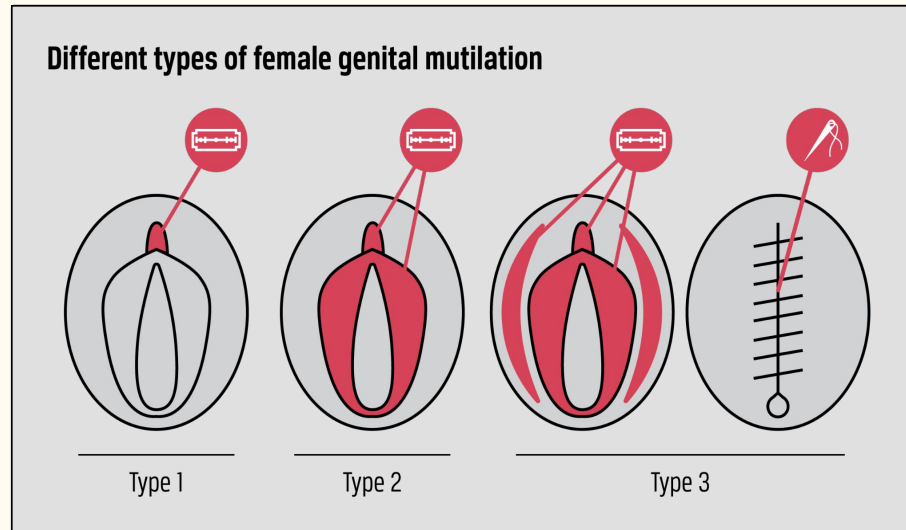
Mission

Sahiyo's mission is to empower Asian and other communities to end female genital cutting through dialogue, education and collaboration.

What is Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C)?

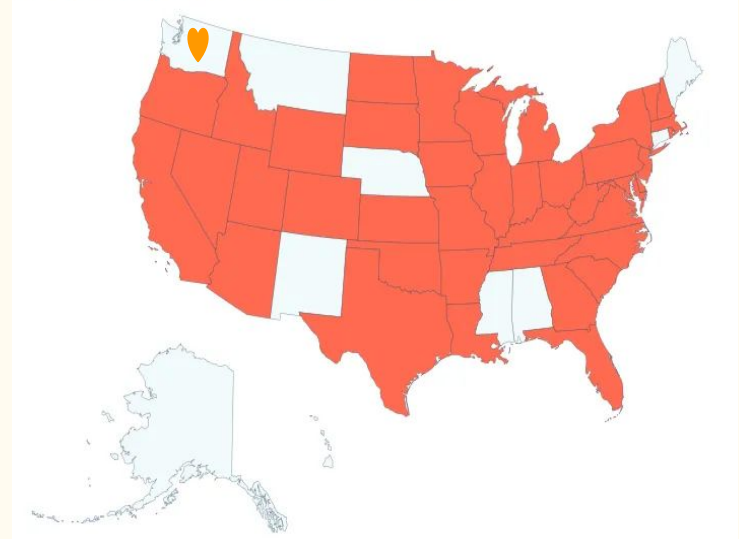
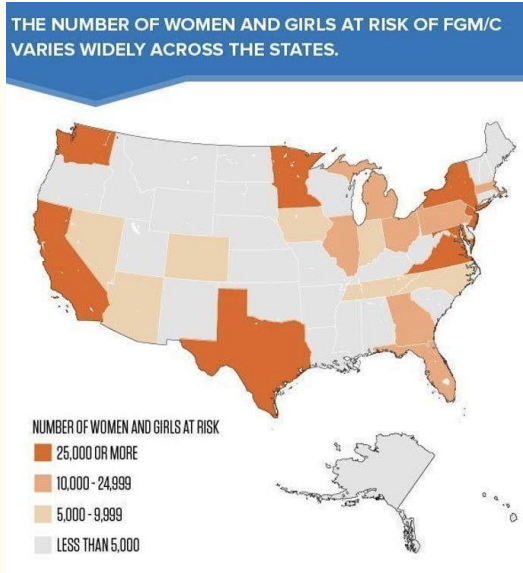
“FGM/C involves the partial or total removal of external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.”

- World Health Organization



FGM/C in the U.S.

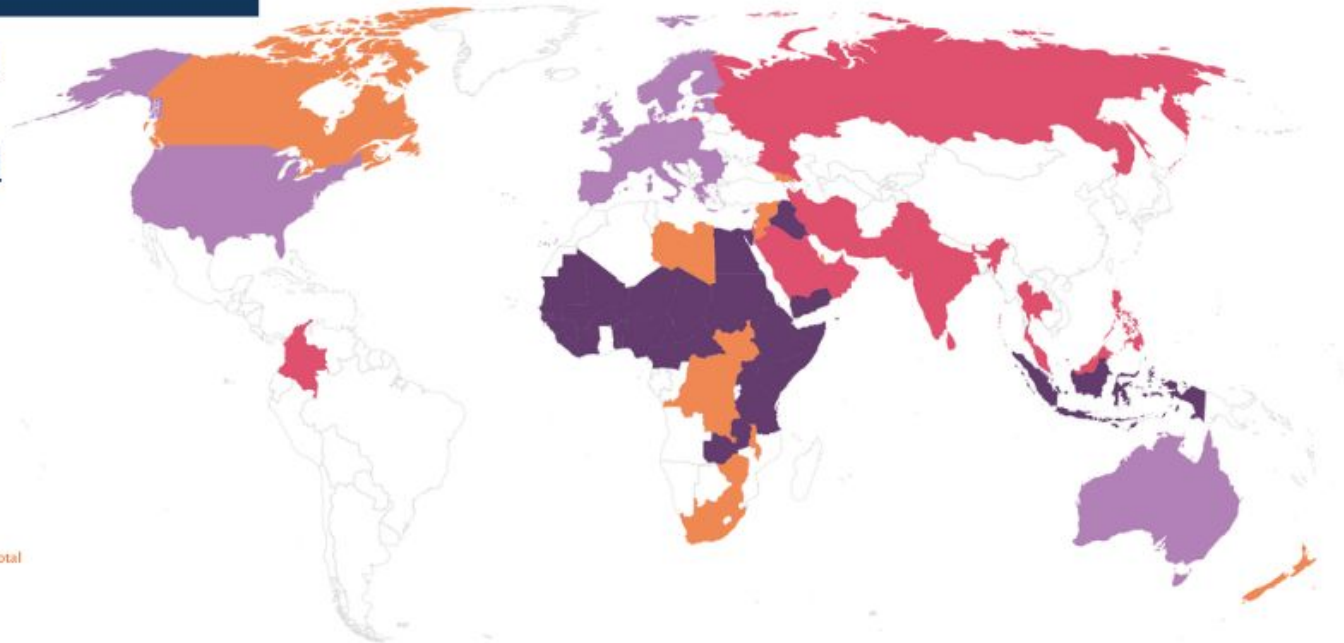
513,000 OR MORE women and girls in the United States had FGM/C performed on them or were at risk of FGM/C in 2012.



FGM/C IS GLOBAL

FGM/C is present in at least 92 countries around the world.

-  CATEGORY 1
Countries with nationally representative surveys on FGM/C
-  CATEGORY 2
Countries with indirect estimates on FGM/C
-  CATEGORY 3
Countries with small-scale studies on FGM/C
-  CATEGORY 4
Countries where media reports and anecdotal evidence refer to occurrence of FGM/C



Source: FGM/C: A Call For A Global Response (2020) Equality Now, End FGM EU Network, US End FGM/C Network

What is intersectionality?

Intersectionality as a framework

“One thing that is helpful is realizing that people face discrimination based on multiple factors, not just FGM/C. It needs to be explored in a context-specific way and lay a foundation for designing programs aimed at change.”

The Combahee River Collective first introduced the concept of intersectionality, defining it as “multiple, interlocking systems of political identities and racial, sexual, and patriarchal oppression.”¹ Kimberlé Crenshaw developed and codified the framework of intersectionality to understand the consequences of treating different social oppressions as mutually exclusive experiences (e.g., race and gender).²

1. Johnson-Agbakwu CE, Wariri O, Kyungu M, et al. Health outcomes and female genital mutilation/cutting: how much is due to the cutting itself? *Int J Impot Res*. 2023. doi: 10.1038/s41443-022-00661-6
2. Crenshaw, K. Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*. 1989; 1(8). Available from: <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>.

About the Project

Critical Intersections: Anti-Racism and FGM/C

Survivor-Centered Activism



Aissata M.B. Camara



About this Report

- Second stage: develop a mixed-methods survey, which was disseminated to **over 200 individuals** in 2022
- This report, based on that survey, includes insights from **over 100 individuals** and organizations working within and beyond the FGM/C sphere
- From the quantitative and qualitative insights, we derived **three sections**:
 - Systemic forces of discrimination
 - Interpersonal and communal forces of discrimination
 - Challenges and opportunities for cross-collaboration

Our Findings

Which forms of oppression
do you see in your work?
How do they manifest?

Forms of Oppression

The report tackles systemic and interpersonal forces of discrimination as they affect survivors and activists.

Xenophobia

Law and Policy

Racism

Religion

Funding

Framing

Gender Inequality

Bodily Autonomy

Systemic forces of discrimination

“There needs to be attention to intersectional identities and relationship that continue to threaten FGM/C-affected communities along the lines of migration, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, class, age, etc.”

Section Highlights:

- Racialized language around FGM/C is often weaponized against Black communities
- Fear of deportation, family separation, and police involvement prevents immigrants from accessing support or justice
- Funding is siloed in the Global Minority World
- Patriarchal structures across religious denominations enable the continuation of the practice

Key Example: Lawmakers are hesitant to take a stance on FGM/C when it's considered “cultural” or “religious”, thus preventing survivors from accessing justice, othering practicing communities, denying the status of FGM/C as gender-based violence, and allowing the practice to continue.

Interpersonal and communal forces of discrimination

“FGM/C is done to control girls and women and as a result of the direct intention of this abuse, it indicates many other forms of abuse either already happening to the survivor or meaning they will be on the way. We are yet to meet a survivor of FGM/C who only survived one form of abuse, all survivors we have known through the years have been subjected to at least three different forms of abuse.”

Theme Highlights:

- Female sexuality and bodily autonomy are not acknowledged or respected
- Male circumcision and “female circumcision” are treated very differently in the community
- There are strong disagreements over the framing of “mutilation” vs. “cutting” within the FGM/C sphere

Key Example: A mother’s desire not to inflict the harms of FGM/C on her daughter is overridden by her husband, who believes that it is his right as head of the family to ensure his girl child, who is now seven, will remain respectable and eventually become a suitable wife.

Do you think there is value in building cross-collaborations between the movement to end FGM/C and other social justice movements?

	Yes	No	Unsure
Individuals working to end FGM/C (n =70)	65 (93%)	2 (3%)	3 (4%)
Individuals not working to end FGM/C (n =16)	14 (88%)	0	2 (13%)
Organizations working to end FGM/C (n =29)	29 (100%)	0	0
Organizations not working to end FGM/C (n =8)	8 (100%)	0	0

Cross-Collaboration

Participants across the board recognize its value. Many shared challenges, and few opportunities, to collective and intersectional work.

Discrimination

Law and Policy

Funding

Education

Do you have any
hesitations towards
cross-collaboration?

—

Challenges become Opportunities

“Cross movement funding may be difficult to come by as these collaborations may need to be already in place before applying for larger \$.”

The capacity and funding of small, community-based organizations can be a hindrance to cross-collaboration. Can collective action around shared goals, including collaboration with larger organizations for funding, also provide an opportunity?

“People think FGM/C is too specific/ nuanced to include in larger social justice movements. It’s a peg of women’s rights and not a movement in and of itself.”

What is a “specific movement”? When we frame FGM/C as a form of GBV or DV/SA, does this allow us to broaden our definition of gendered violence and encourage banding together with other “specific” movements to create coalitions?

Opportunities for Success

“The key is partnering with organizations whose vision and mission align with your own...”

Opportunities mentioned by participants:

- Implementing collaborative community programming
- Creating organizational partnerships
- Cross-movement networking and education
- Joint social media and public awareness campaigns

What are your organization’s values? How can you recognize alignment within another organization, even if different approaches or goals are in place?

When looking at collaborative programming, what can guide your search for partners? Is there a balance of strengths and weaknesses; diversity in voices; umbrella vision?

Case Study: Cross-sector Collaboration



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Next Steps

Ensure resources, terminology, and information on and about FGM/C is **accessible, equitable, and does not reinforce unequal systems of power.**

Implement programming that addresses the intersecting needs of survivors from diverse backgrounds.

Create opportunities for foundation building, including introduction, education, and training, before seeking cross-collaboration with other social justice movements as well as cross-sector funding.

Uplift more **equitable systems of funding** that prioritize community based organizations working with practicing communities using a bottom-up approach.

Brainstorming legitimate opportunities for synergistic collaboration should be initiated and facilitated by intersectional organizations.

Consider interpersonal challenges, such as discrimination within practicing communities, when framing the topic with survivors and generating approaches to ending FGM/C.

Recognize the strength of various approaches to framing FGM/C, as opposed to the exclusive use of one label, for anti-FGM/C work and collaborations with other movements.

Consider the nuance of geographic location, particularly in regard to local laws, when seeking potential partnerships and opportunities for cross-collaboration with other social justice movements.

Qualitative Findings

- From November 2022-February 2023, the team conducted qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews with **30 participants**
- More than **70%** of all participants worked in FGM/C prevention, and **55%** of participants were raised in a community that practices FGM/C
- This report focuses on similar themes, such as the intersections of race and religion, with more extensive insight from participants. In addition, it presents intersections with Queer gender and sexuality
- **To be released later in 2024**

Discussion

How can an intersectional lens be used in your work?

Have you engaged in cross-sector collaboration before? If so, what did you learn?

Where do you think collective action with other movements could be used in your approach to ending gender-based violence?

Are there any hesitations that you have about partnering with other movements or sectors?

How do we turn this data
into action?

Sahiyo's Training & Technical Assistance

We provide training and technical assistance to **educate and build the capacity of service providers and front-line professionals** working with FGM/C survivors, including:

- GBV organizations
- Law enforcement agencies
- Schools/universities
- Social work agencies
- Healthcare providers

Through these training sessions, organizations are able to better incorporate culturally responsive programming on FGM/C into their work.

If you would like to get in touch with us for a workshop or presentation, please fill out our [Community Presentation Request](#) form or email aries@sahiyo.org.



Listen to stories that address intersectionality!



Voices to End FGM/C

Check Out:

Voices Podcast available on
[Apple Podcasts](#) and [Spotify](#)

Voices Stories available on
Sahiyo's [Voices Website](#)

For more info visit
voicestoendfgmc.org or email
info@voicestoendfgmc.org

More information:



Mixed Methods Report

<https://bit.ly/FGCIntersections2>



Sahiyo's Critical Intersections page

<https://bit.ly/SahiyoCritical>

Thank you!

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Questions?
