

Do No Harm: Joint Statement against the medicalization of Female Genital Mutilation in Asia-Pacific - A Call to Action

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The medicalization of female genital mutilation (FGM) is one of the most profound **violations** of the human rights and ethical principles that underpin healthcare practice.

In 2024, over 230 million women and girls globally had undergone FGM, with 80 million of them living in Asia. (1) Alarming, around 1 in 4 acts of FGM are carried out by professional health workers, in clinics or homes. This creates the misconception that FGM is 'safer' and 'less harmful' when performed by health professionals.

Let us be clear: FGM is never safe. It is a deeply harmful practice that inflicts both physical and psychological harm, violating the right to health, well-being and bodily autonomy of women and girls, and should not be practiced or condoned by anyone - including health workers.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) in Asia-Pacific, the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM), the International

Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO), and the Asia Network to End FGM/C stand united in condemning the medicalization of FGM.

Through this joint statement, we call upon every midwife, nurse, doctor and other health worker in standing firm against the practice of FGM, and we reaffirm our support to every health professional – and to policymakers, health authorities and political and societal leaders – in implementing urgent, proactive actions that protect women and girls.

We urge **all midwives, nurses, doctors and other health workers** in Asia-Pacific to:

1. **Uphold the fundamental principle of human rights and medical ethics of 'do no harm'** by unequivocally refusing to perform, assist with, or facilitate FGM in any form. The practice of FGM offers no health benefits and is linked with increased risk of lifelong physical and psychological harm. No type or subtype of FGM is morally, ethically or socially acceptable, and no subtype of FGM prevalent in this region presents evidence of benefit, and as such cannot be medically and ethically justified or promoted.
2. **Protect the bodily autonomy and integrity of women, girls and newborns**, by actively opposing the medicalization of FGM, rejecting any social or cultural pressures to perform it.
3. **Adhere to and promote compliance with professional codes of conduct and codes of ethics** that explicitly prohibit FGM and its medicalization, by prioritizing women and girls' physical and psychological well-being over any religious beliefs or cultural and social norms.

We further urge **professional health bodies, including regulatory authorities, professional health workers' associations, health educators and relevant Government departments and Ministries** to:

1. **Establish and enforce professional codes of conduct that clearly prohibit the practice of FGM in any form or setting**, ensuring health workers understand their professional and ethical obligations to refuse to perform FGM. Technical

resources are available to support health workers in rejecting FGM medicalization, advocating for the elimination of this harmful practice.

2. **Integrate FGM prevention into pre-service and postgraduate curricula for midwives, nurses, doctors and other health workers** (including as part of continuing professional development) to prevent and respond to FGM and raise awareness of its harms among their peers and communities.
3. Advocate for strong legal protection and accountability by supporting laws that explicitly prohibit all forms of FGM in Asia-Pacific, regardless of who performs it or where, and ensure that these laws are effectively enforced. Establishing independent monitoring and reporting systems aids the identification of FGM-related violations.

UNFPA, WHO, ICM, FIGO and the Asia Network to End FGM/C are committed to working together with partners across Asia-Pacific to end the medicalization of FGM.

We count on the support of all health stakeholders to join us.

FGM has no place in our world. It is our collective responsibility to uphold the right to health and wellbeing of women and girls, in Asia-Pacific and beyond. Let us join efforts to ensure this harmful practice is eliminated once and for all throughout the region, allowing women and girls to thrive and achieve their full potential.

Agencies and partners contributing to the joint statement:

- United Nations Population Fund, Asia-Pacific Regional Office
- World Health Organization, South-East Asia Regional Office
- World Health Organization, Western Pacific Regional Office
- International Confederation of Midwives
- International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics
- Asia Network to End FGM/C

References

- (1) The practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in the Asia region is often referred to as Female Genital Cutting. For the purposes of this statement, we use the global terminology of “FGM” to refer to the practice, while noting that other terms such as Cutting or FGM/C are also normally used across the region. Data source: Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Statistics (UNICEF).