Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) or Female Genital Cutting (FGC) – are terms used to cover a wide variety of practices that involve cutting the genitalia of women/young girls. Formerly known as female circumcision, the former terms were used to distinguish the practice from male circumcision which is generally considered a much milder practice. One of the most severe versions of FGM – clitoridectomy (cutting of the clitoris) and infibulation (cutting off the inner labia and stitching of the outer labia leaving a small hole) is widely performed in Somalia. This is what Aman experienced and described in graphic detail.

**When is FGC carried out?**
The age at which FGM is carried out varies. FGM may occur during infancy, childhood, marriage or during first pregnancy. FGM is typically performed on young girls who are between 4 and 12 years old.

[Aman was circumcised at the age of 9.]

**Where is FGC practiced?**
FGC is practiced predominantly in 28 countries in Africa. It is also practiced in some Middle Eastern countries-Egypt, the Republic of Yemen, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Israel and among some Muslim groups in Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and India.

Some immigrants practice various forms of FGC in other parts of the world, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States and in European nations.

**How many women and girls in the world have been affected by FGC? In the United States?**
It is estimated that 130 million girls and women have undergone FGC.

In countries like Somalia, Mali, Guinea, and Egypt the proportion of affected women is nearly 90%

An estimated 168,000 women and girls in the United States had either undergone FGC or were at risk for FGC in 1990.

From 2005 UNICEF report: 3 Million girls undergo FGM each year.

**Are there any negative effects/consequences?**
Bleeding leading to shock –sometimes leading to death. (“Aminata’s friend died within a week). Infection; difficult labor; urine retention; infertility; sexual difficulty
Why is FGC practiced?

Generally FGC is considered to be an important rite of passage into womanhood. It is closely linked to a woman’s/girl’s sense of belonging, as well as her purity. Uncircumcised women are considered unclean. Other rationale for FGC include beliefs that FGC enhances male sexuality; curbs female sexual desire; has aesthetic benefits; and prevents promiscuity and preserves virginity and that the clitoris is an unhealthy, unattractive and/or lethal organ.

In many societies that practice FGM it is thought that a woman/girl cannot maintain sexual purity unless she is circumcised. Clitoridectomy and infibulation reduce a woman’s desire for sex…thus ensuring her purity.

Is FGM required by Islam?

While many practitioners/supporters believe it to be the case, Islam does not require female circumcision. In fact, FGM predates Islam and is not practiced by the majority of Muslims and actually cuts across religious and cultural lines. FGM is practiced by Coptic Christians, members of various indigenous groups, Protestants and Catholics, etc. Religion, however, is often cited as one of the reasons for which practitioners support FGM.

Source: [http://www.4woman.gov/faq/fgc.htm](http://www.4woman.gov/faq/fgc.htm)

4Woman.gov The National Women’s Health Information Center