CHOOSING A WORLD FREE FROM FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING
AISSATA’S TRUE STORY

Over 200 million girls and women around the world are living with the consequences of female genital cutting (FGC). Millions more are at risk each year.

FGC is the full or partial removal of a girl’s external genitals.

More and more, girls are cut under the age of 5.
FGC affects women and girls in at least 45 countries across Africa, the Middle East, Asia and within the global diasporas in the UK, Europe, Australasia and the Americas. [Source: UNICEF]

This includes:

- 49% of girls in Indonesia. Many are cut when they are born.
- 98% in Somalia.
- An estimated 137,000 in the UK.
- An estimated 8% in Iraq, but more research is needed.
- Survivors in Canada have started to speak out, but the scale of FGC there is unknown.
- Girls from the Dawoodi Bohra community in India, usually at age 7.

Aissata, age 42, from Northern Senegal.

I was cut at 7 years old. I remember it as if it was yesterday...
My aunt dropped me off at a house with two of my friends. I was confused.

Auntie, where are we going?

The pain was indescribable. I didn’t understand what was happening.
After I was cut, I haemorrhaged for three days.

Life was then expected to continue as “normal”. I loved school, but I missed a lot while I was recovering.
As I grew older, I learnt that being cut is an ancient practice that meant girls would be respected in the community. I was told this was to ensure a girl’s virginity until marriage. My parents had me cut because they wanted the best for my future.

In our ethnic group, the labia and clitoris are often cut, and the vagina opening is sealed with dried blood and herbs, leaving just a small hole.

CUTTING CAN CAUSE LOTS OF PROBLEMS THROUGHOUT LIFE.

Girls around the world undergo different types of cut.

- Shock
- Death
- Pain
- Trauma

Menstrual Problems
DEPRESSION
URINE RETENTION
INFERTILITY
INFECTIONS
SCARRING

DIFFICULT LABOUR
STILLBIRTH
HAEMORRHAGE

MARITAL PROBLEMS
When I got married, I had to be cut open again for my wedding night. I almost couldn’t stand the pain. But we had two beautiful children that I love.

Years later, we took part in a basic three-year education programme in our local language, thanks to a grassroots organisation. We learned so much about human rights and responsibilities!
Many months passed, with many, many discussions...

Even though we had been questioning it on our own, it took us a long time to speak openly about FGC. It was difficult, but once we did, we learnt that most Muslim women in the world aren’t cut. We also learnt that FGC is a violation of our human right to health.

I’m worried that if we cut my daughter, it will cause her lots of health problems. But if we don’t, no man will marry her, and she will be excluded. The community expects it!

My daughter still has health problems. I would support anyone who chooses not to cut their daughter.

We spoke with religious leaders and found that this tradition is not an obligation of Islam or any religion.
After our education programme, we made a community-wide decision to end FGC together! Now, many more girls are still in school. Like my daughter, they are healthier and happier.

Talking openly helped me realise we practiced FGC because we thought others wanted it to continue. Now, I volunteer with others in the community, traveling to other villages to share why we chose to abandon FGC.
After much discussion, many villages join the movement too!

50 villages joined the thousands of communities that have publicly declared that they’ve abandoned FGC.

We’re here today in front of relatives and neighboring communities, to declare publicly that we will no longer cut our daughters, joining a growing movement of thousands of villages.
To date, thousands of communities have abandoned FGC worldwide and the movement is growing.

[Source: UNFPA, UNICEF]
ABANDONMENT OF FGC CAN BRING ABOUT TRANSFORMATIVE BENEFITS FOR THE WIDER COMMUNITY.

We’re all proud to say that our daughters and future generations will not be cut. Together, we can all be part of creating a world free from FGC.

With your help, FGC can end globally within a generation. **Join the movement.**

Share. Discuss. Act. #EndFGC
With thanks to Aissata for sharing her story and to Tostan whose Community Empowerment Programme is featured throughout this comic.

Orchid Project is deeply proud to support Aissata, Tostan and other activists and organisations around the world working to end this practice.

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