



# CHOOSING A WORLD FREE FROM FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING

Learning activities for KS3/4 learners

(with accompanying guidance for educators)



## Activity 3 FROM MYTHS TO FACTS

## Overview

Bigger-than-self issues such as FGC can often be surrounded by misinformation and stereotypical views. If these are repeated enough then they can become entrenched as myths. If not challenged or countered then these myths can undermine efforts to improve lives and bring about positive social change. This activity supports young people to explore myths and facts, attitudes and other information relating to FGC. The key learning intentions are:

1. to understand the difference between a fact and a myth;
2. to recognise that myths are often associated with key social issues (like FGC);
3. to develop some skills to help young people confront and debunk myths when they encounter them.

## Activity 3

### From myths to facts



PPT



## Information

This activity introduces a sensitive and perhaps controversial issue to young people. It is important to consider what this means for your learners and for your role as the educator before commencing with the activity. More detailed notes relating to these issues are included in the 'Guide' document that forms part of the wider resource and you are encouraged to read this before starting the individual activities. A reminder of some key points to consider in relation to this activity:

### Sensitivity issues:

- Do you have learners who may be directly exposed to (or at risk from) the issues covered in this activity/resource?
- How will you help ALL learners to engage in this and avoid it being seen as a 'female' issue?

### Facilitation issues (see '[A short guide to facilitating learning](#)' for more):

- How will you create an environment that supports dialogue and enquiry?
- What will your role be as the educator? How will you support the learning?

### Safety issues (see '[Safe Spaces for caring and critical learning](#)' for more):

- How will you make sure learners feel secure to talk about the issue?
- Are there limits to what can be discussed and why are these there?
- Are you aware of safeguarding procedures should they be needed?

### Process (part 1)

This activity builds on the learning from activity 2 (Campaigning as Change) and so assumes that learners have watched the animation, [Aissata's True Story](#) and engaged in the concept of a campaign.

1. Explain to learners that one of the challenges for campaigners is address any myths that might exist about the issue they are trying to change and making sure that people have and understand the key facts instead.

Ask learners to quickly buzz with a partner about why 'myths' surrounding an important issue like FGC might be important to break down.

Share back a few key ideas with the wider group if learners are happy to volunteer their thoughts.

2. Ask learners to think about the animation about FGC *[Note: if some time has elapsed you may wish to re-show it].*

There were several different myths – things that people believed about FGC that they later found out to be incorrect or only partially true through discussions and learning.

**Ask learners if they can pick out any of these myths from the animation.**

*[Note: Myths that learners might identify could include: practising FGC is part of Muslim faith; Girls who have undergone FGC are pure; FGC is an important rite of passage or ritual for girls to become women and be respected.]*

3. Introduce the idea that identifying myths might be easier if we are more certain about what a myth is, and how it differs from a fact. Try the following steps to support this process:
  - Working in small groups (3-4 per group) ask learners to try and define 'what is a myth?' and then 'what is a fact?' – sharing their suggested definition on a sticky note or scrap paper.
  - Share a few of their ideas in the wider group, and work with learners to try and draw out the common criteria for each term.
  - Share the definitions on PowerPoint slide 1 and see how they compare to those created by the learners. Do they add anything further that they had maybe not thought about?

**Fact:** A fact is a piece of information that can be proven to be true with evidence, often scientific, and that has been created through research or study by experts.

**Myth:** Traditionally a myth is a story told over and over (and often changing through time). In relation to facts, a myth is a belief or understanding that is held by people, but shaped by ideas, stories and information that may be wholly, or partly fictional.

*[Note: a myth is different to an opinion because a myth is believed by many people, often and over time. The word 'opinion' is often used to describe the thinking or ideas of one person, and may also be just in the moment.]*

## Process (part 2)

Building on part 1, this next step engages learners in exploring the facts that they can identify about FGC from comic (and animation).

1. Give out copies of the *Aissata's true story* comic to learners ([available to download as a PDF here](#)) in small groups (4-6 maximum). *[Note: if ICT allows this could also be done by providing learners with access to the online version of the comic at <https://positivenegatives.org/story/aissatas-story/animation-comic/>]*

Ask them to engage in the story again and to make a list of any facts that they can extract from it. These could be written on scrap paper or sticky notes or if using paper copies of the comic, learners could mark directly onto these.

2. When learners have extracted quite a few facts, invite them to share back as a whole group to build a shared factual understanding of FGC. *[Note: in the introductory guidance notes for this resource we have included additional facts to those covered in the comic/animation and provided links to further sources of FGC facts. You may wish to draw on these if learners have particular questions or a strong desire to know more].*
3. Draw learners' attention to the language used to describe the practice in the animation and comic – female genital gutting'. Ask if any of them know of other terms to describe this practice (they may identify female genital mutilation (FGM) and possibly female circumcision).



Explain that in these activities, and in Aissata's story, the term 'cutting' is deliberately used. This is because for some people or communities, it is less judgemental than the term 'mutilation' or 'mutilated'. On the other hand, as FGC is a violent act that is a violation of human, child and women's rights, and so others believe 'mutilation' reflects the severity of the practice and its consequences. Whatever term is used, being able to talk about the practice is a vital first step in helping people to question it and bring about changes that lead to it being stopped.

Ask learners if they agree with the choice to use 'cutting' instead of other terms and give them a chance to air their views. If needed, you might like to ask them how it would feel to be described as having been 'mutilated' compared to having been 'cut'?

*[Note: if you want to know more about the choice of language and the preference for 'cutting' then there is a very useful explanation on one of the partner's websites - <https://www.orchidproject.org/why-do-we-use-the-term-female-genital-cutting-and-not-female-genital-mutilation/>]*

## Process (part 3)

This next step moves beyond facts and myths to think about how these can form our attitudes towards issues (including towards FGC).

1. Introduce learners to the idea of 'attitudes' and ask them how they think the formation of an attitude links to the myths and facts that they were exploring earlier.

*[Note: the idea here is to support learners to recognise that the attitudes people (including ourselves) are partly formed by our exposure to and engagement with facts and myths].*

2. Inform learners that there are a wide range of attitudes towards FGC held by young people and adults in the UK.

- Some of those attitudes are shown in the box to the right (and available to show learners on PowerPoint slide 2).

### Some attitudes towards FGC

- *It's a Muslim thing.*
- *It's nothing to do with me cos I'm not a woman.*
- *We shouldn't interfere in other people's cultures – I wouldn't want them telling me what to do.*
- *We shouldn't be learning about this – it's too upsetting!*
- *I don't even want to think about it!*
- *What's this got to do with me – it's an African issue, isn't it?*
- *Well, there's nothing I can do about it anyway!*
- *Why do girls let themselves get cut – I wouldn't let them near me!*
- *It doesn't happen here (in the UK)*

- Discuss briefly whether (and how) these are similar or different to the attitudes presented in Aissata's True Story.

3. Explain that they will now be able to explore the ideas of an FGC Ambassador and Trainer, Sarian Karim Kamara (right and PowerPoint slide 3, who also featured in one of the images used in Activity 1). Sarian was asked to respond to some of these UK attitudes about FGC.

- Organise learners into small groups (4-6 in each) and give each group a set of UK FGC attitudes (available on page 5) and a set of Sarian's numbered responses (available on page 6).



- Ask learners to suggest which of Sarian's responses might help to challenge or counter each of the attitudes. They can write the number of Sarian's response next to the relevant attitude/s (noting that one response might work for more than one of the attitudes).
- Give learners a chance to share their responses (perhaps by swapping with a neighbouring group, or you could go through each attitude as a group).

*[Note: it might be worth noting to learners that we were focussing on what might be called 'negative' or 'limiting' attitudes towards FGC in that last activity. Not everyone in the UK holds such attitudes and indeed there are many who have attitudes that are helping to raise awareness of FGC (e.g. by pointing out the harm it causes) and prevent the practice (e.g. by sharing that it is a human rights issue for everyone) both in the UK, and internationally.]*

4. Finish this step by asking learners to reflect back on the idea of 'key messages' as they might be used in a campaign against FGC. Looking at Sarian's responses to some of the UK attitudes, can they draw out what they think the three key messages might be from the point of view of someone like Sarian who has experienced the practice and who now campaigns against it.

## Process (part 4)

This final step provides a creative opportunity for learners to consolidate and reflect on their learning by creating some form of FGC fact sharing output. This could be done in small groups, or if time is limited this could be given as a homework/private study task.

1. Introduce learners to the idea of producing a 'fact-sharing' output using the criteria outlined on PowerPoint slide 4.
2. Share some creative options that learners could consider for this, including for example, a poster, infographic, song, poem, series of 'memes' for social media, video-clip, short role play etc.

Encourage them to come up with their own ideas too.

*[Note: If you are working with older learners (14 yrs +) you may wish to consider showing this music video (<http://integrateuk.org/iuk-projects/myclitoris/>) that a group of young people made about Type 4 FGC (see <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation> for information about different types of FGC if required).*

*The video has graphic language about the body but is very engaging and funny. We strongly advise viewing it yourself before sharing with learners, in order to decide if it is appropriate for them. If you do use it, learners could decide whether it is an effective fact-sharing tool, or whether it more about campaigning, or perhaps both? Does it support any myths or attitudes that we might think are limiting or negative?]*

3. Depending on how you choose to run this (i.e. within formal sessions, or as a homework task), think about how learners could share their chosen outputs in a meaningful way. They could be used as the basis of an assembly to peers, or to create a display within school or via school websites/social media platforms for example.

*[Note: The following sources may be useful to learners and could be given to them to further research and develop their outputs].*

### United Nations World Health Organisation source:

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation>

### UNICEF Info graphics and fact brochure:

[https://www.unicef.org/media/files/FGMC\\_2016\\_brochure\\_final\\_UNICEF\\_SPREAD.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/files/FGMC_2016_brochure_final_UNICEF_SPREAD.pdf)

### Orchid Project

<https://orchidproject.org/category/about-fgc/what-is-fgc/>

### Tostan outline their Community Empowerment Programme here:

<https://www.tostan.org/areas-of-impact/cross-cutting-gender-social-norms/female-genital-cutting/>

## Some attitudes to FGC

*It's a Muslim thing.*

*I don't even want to think about it!*

*Why do girls let themselves get cut – I wouldn't let them near me!*

*Well, there's nothing I can do about it anyway!*

*It's nothing to do with me cos I'm not a woman.*

*We shouldn't be learning about this – it's too upsetting!*

*We shouldn't interfere in other people's cultures – I wouldn't want them telling me what to do?*

*What's this got to do with me – it's an African issue, isn't it?*

*It doesn't happen here (in the UK)*

# Sarian Karim Kamara - responding to attitudes

1

"It's nothing to do with culture because culture is supposed to be something that is very healthy, some things that bring people together. And this one [FGC] is very harmful."

2

"Look into it, and look out for your friends".

3

"We have to be as honest as we can so that someone like yourself would understand the nature and the dangers involved with cutting girls".

4

"What we do, we come with our baggages; baggages that we unpack here; which are cultural values; and FGC happens to be one of those".

5

"Just in case you end up in that situation you would know what to do... and you would know what is involved. This is why we have to educate everybody. And like I said, it's everybody's business. It's not just an 'African' business."

6

"There's so much you can do. You can talk to your neighbours about it. You can talk to your friends about it, because you don't know who is at risk from FGC."

7

"In most cases girls don't know what is going to happen to them. You are just told that you are going to go into this very important rite of passage and you are going to become a very important woman in the community."