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## FGM/C and ECM: Drawing lessons from research

Jacinta Muteshi-Strachan  
*Population Council*

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# FGM/C and ECM: Drawing Lessons from Research

Jacinta Muteshi-Strachan, PhD.  
Population Council

Conference: “Child Marriage Research Meeting: Session on drawing lessons from research on related issues & on forging convergence”.

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# Introduction

- ❖ Global consensus: FGM/C and ECM as gendered, socially endorsed harmful practices\*.
- ❖ Female genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) often linked to marriageability and thought to be associated with Early/Child Marriage (ECM)
  - ECM and FGM/C may operate alone, in combination or collectively
    - ✓ But little rigorous research to clarify the relationship between FGMC & ECM to inform policy, programming and investment.

# What are we learning from the FGM/C Research programme? “*Investments need to be evidence based*”

- ❖ Understand the geography and pattern of practice key for targeting investment
  - Critical to highlight sub-national level data, identify hot spots/areas of risk.
- ❖ Provide rigorous evidence:
  - “Cultural” practices evolve; shifting discourses and norms, & underpinning structures.
  - Intervention elements that make a difference
- ❖ Measurement challenges: understanding the how & efficacy of complex interventions.
- ❖ Legislation: a challenged and mixed record

# What does the Evidence say about links between ECM and FGM/C?

Recent Demographic and Health survey (DHS) and Multiple Cluster Survey (MICS) data for 10 Sub-Saharan countries and review of the literature

❖ **Prevalence:** Significant variations in national, sub-national & ethnic groups -by country.

- ❖ **Associations:** Between ECM and FGM/C vary by country, along with predictors for each.
- Dynamics in which practices occur vary
  - Contextual realities: some settings one practice in decline, in another sustained or rising.
  - In most of our study countries could be a prerequisite.

❖ **Similarities** in causes and underlying drivers:

- Affords social capital
- Maintenance of chastity
- Gendered relational practices based on power structures.

# What are the Implications?

More evidence needed on the best strategies for supporting abandonment of ECM and FGM/C including :

1. Knowledge of the drivers and consequences of FGM/C & ECM in **specific contexts**, to build a detailed understanding that also enables generalizations
2. **Impact of FGM/C and ECM interventions** on wider gender norms, which requires strengthened monitoring and evaluation frameworks and systems
3. Need for more **attention to theory-based intervention** and evaluation designs
4. Improved **coordination** among advocates, implementers, policy makers and researchers

# What are the opportunities for convergence between FGMC and ECM?

- ❖ FGM/C a precursor in some context for ECM but not in other contexts.
- ❖ In contexts where both practices prevalent may not always be strongly associated.....

## HOWEVER:

- Both perceived as having important roles that range from “securing the well being and physical security of daughters; and/or securing family honour; and/or offering social and economic advantage to families; and/or enabling transition to adulthood.... ***But in ways that sustain some of the structural injustices that girls and women may experience.***

# What are the opportunities for convergence between FGMC and ECM?

- ❖ Variations and complexities of local realities means approaches can't be standard:

**BUT:**

- Secondary education an enabling condition: *Educated mothers likely to keep children in school & not support FGM/C or ECM. Enabled delayed marriage;*
  - ✓ Tested Intervention packages\*: *educational interventions (provision of school materials, conditional cash transfers, community conversations on social norms) **have high quality results but are they sustainable? Do they translate into livelihood security?***
- ❖ Laws provide support for abandonment of FGMC & ECM: - Infrastructural responses required?



# Conclusion

## *Lesson:*

**Our improved understanding of the emerging structural factors that underpin and/or sustain FGM/C are beginning to clarify the mechanisms of action required, & call for more multi-sectoral intervention designs.**



The Evidence to End FGM/C programme consortium generates evidence to inform and influence investments, policies, and programs for ending female genital mutilation/cutting in different contexts.

Evidence to End FGM/C is led by the Population Council in partnership with the Africa Coordination Centre for Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (Kenya); Gender and Reproductive Health & Rights Centre (Sudan); MannionDaniels, Ltd.; Population Reference Bureau; University of California, San Diego; and University of Washington. Evidence to End FGM/C is funded by UK aid by the UK Government.



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