

PSYCHIATRY'S ROLE IN CARING FOR THE PATIENT SURVIVOR OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

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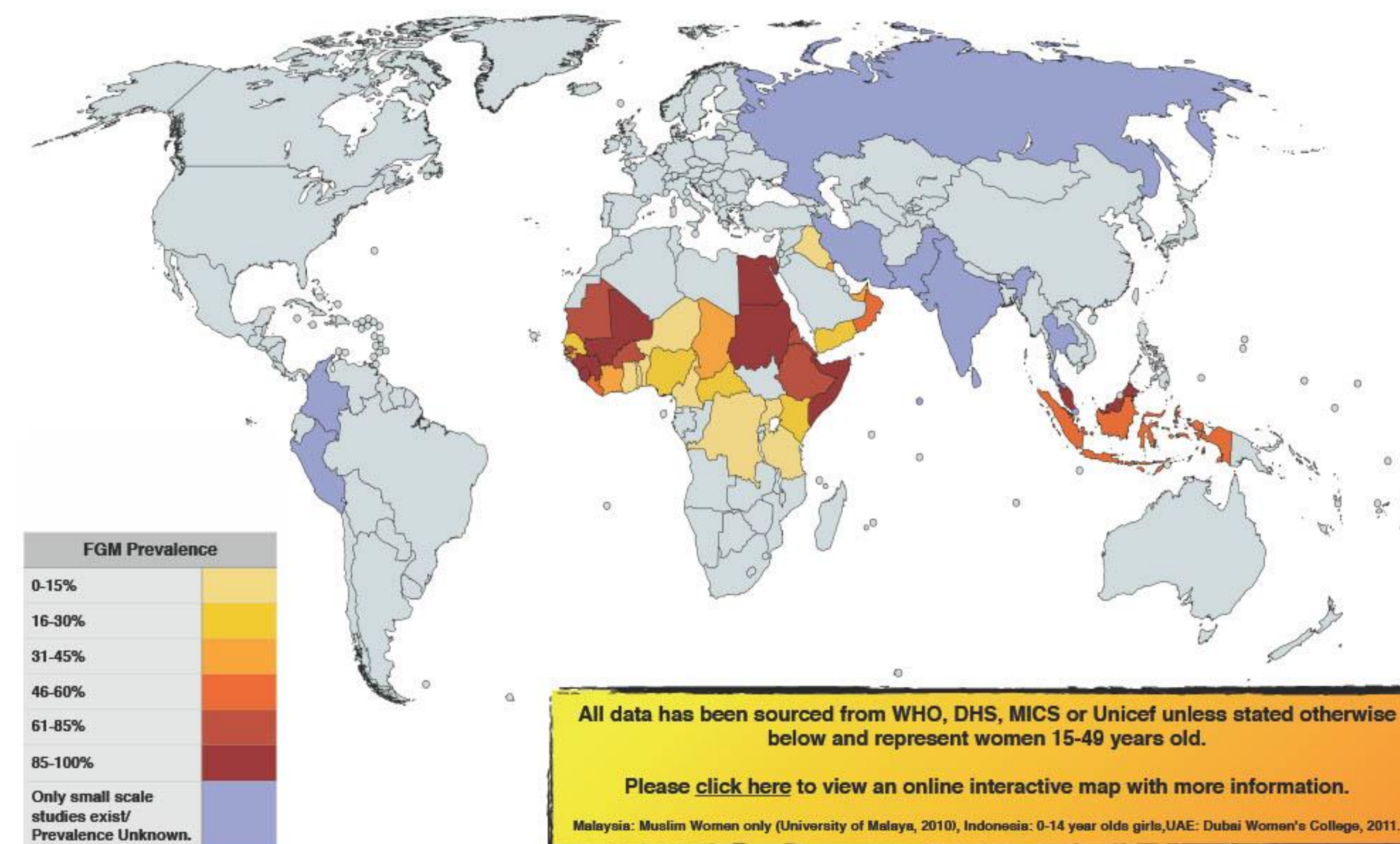
INTRODUCTION

- Female genital cutting or mutilation (FGM), also known as female circumcision, is the medically unwarranted partial or total surgical removal of the vulva and vagina.
- FGM is classified as a human rights violation per WHO and is illegal in the US as of 1996, yet it is estimated on the rise (Goldberg, 2016).
- The incidence of FGM is concentrated in certain world localities and cultures. The practice is not fully understood in global or Western culture, and may be rooted in traditional or religious beliefs.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified 30 countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East where FGM is incident. In several countries, more than 90 percent of women ages 15 to 49 have undergone such surgeries.
- In the US, FGM is prevalent among certain immigrant populations.
- 2012 estimates projected over 500,000 women and girls in the US were at risk of FGM or its consequences.
- Estimates of incidence and prevalence of FGM are difficult to obtain due to lack of awareness as to the scope of the problem.

METHODS

- We conducted a broad PubMed literature review for recent (30 years) FGM literature, and a narrow review with search items to include iterations of: "female genital mutilation", "mental health", "psychiatry".
- We reviewed selected studies for findings on the mental health impact of FGM.

FGM Global Prevalence Map (%)



FINDINGS

- Studies on the mental health effects of FGM are scarce, less-than-rigorous, and disparate in results, though the majority have found that there are adverse psychiatric consequences to the experience of FGM.
- Per extant scientific literature, patients with a history of FGM seek medical care with primary care physicians, obstetricians-gynecologists, urologists and plastic surgeons, presenting with urologic symptoms, gynecologic symptoms and obstetric complications.
- In terms of the mental health impact of FGM, a total of 21 original studies on the mental health impact of FGM set in countries in the African continent, Europe, the Middle East and Iran were determined relevant and included.
- Mental health sequelae of FGM, and factors that correlate with those mental health sequelae, include:
 - Degree and duration of medical complications, including bleeding, pain, scarring, urinary symptoms and gynecologic complications
 - PTSD and trauma symptomatology
 - Sleep disturbances
 - Memory disturbances
 - Depression and anxiety
 - Disordered eating

FINDINGS

(continued...)

- Sexual dysfunction
- Age at which FGM occurred (infancy, late adolescence or adulthood)
- Psychosocial factors, including level of education, abuse and poly-victimization.
- 19 of the 21 studies found adverse psychiatric consequences to the experience of FGM.
- Of the 21 studies, 48% (n=10) were conducted in obstetrics and gynecology, 29% (n=6) in primary care or public health, 19% (n=4) in psychiatry and 1 in pediatrics.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

FGM is associated with an array of health problems crossing multiple medical disciplines, although precise and reliable estimates are lacking due to lack of work in the area.

Our findings described above are based on scientific literature that was sparse and less-than-rigorous.

Psychiatric literature on the mental health impact of FGM is similarly lacking. We highlight our current knowledge and identify directions for future work.

Within psychiatry, the scope of the problem spans consultation-liaison psychiatry, child and adolescent psychiatry, women's health and reproductive psychiatry, global and cross-cultural psychiatry, and immigrant and refugee mental health.

Currently, the role of psychiatry in caring for patients who have a history of FGM remains unaddressed. Preliminary findings strongly suggest this is an area of interest in psychiatry, and more work needs to be done to determine the extent of the problem.

REFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The author acknowledges potentially unaddressed cultural considerations in attempting to understand the practice of FGM for the purposes of this research poster.