



Female genital mutilation

The World Health Organisation defines female genital mutilation as:

*all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.*¹

It is the policy of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation that:

1. The ANMF condemns the practice of female genital mutilation in any form as a fundamental violation of women and girls human rights.
2. Australians have diverse cultural beliefs that should be respected within the community. However any cultural practice which results in any individual or group being subjected to procedures which are physically and psychologically harmful is unacceptable.
3. Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing are encouraged to work with community groups involved in eliminating female genital mutilation and to act as advocates for vulnerable people and their families.
4. Reasonable efforts and projects which aim to eliminate the practice of female genital mutilation are supported. Australia has no national integrated female genital mutilation prevention policy linking health, education and community services. This should be a priority.
5. Female genital mutilation is illegal in Australia. It is, therefore, illegal for a nurse, midwife or assistant in nursing to assist in female genital mutilation.
6. All nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing have a duty of care to be informed about the procedure of female genital mutilation and be able to provide or make referral to appropriate and culturally sensitive health education, information, and counselling on this issue to individuals and groups as required.
7. Those who have experienced female genital mutilation should not be discriminated against and should be cared for in a culturally safe and respectful manner. Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing caring for or likely to be caring for, people who have experienced female genital mutilation must be provided with appropriate support education and training.
8. Professional counselling should be provided for those nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing who are distressed by the issue of female genital mutilation. This counselling should be provided without cost to the nurse, midwife or assistant in nursing.
9. Female genital mutilation has a significant impact on women's psychological and physical wellbeing. It causes complications for menstruation, sexual problems, urinary tract infections, bleeding and complications during childbirth and for the newborn. Nurses and midwives should be provided with the education and support to enable them to best meet the needs of these women.
10. Health services need to provide sensitive nursing and midwifery models of care so that women who have endured female genital mutilation and who are accessing health services, feel more safe and secure to identify any history of female genital mutilation.



11. Women who are pregnant and have experienced female genital mutilation should be allocated, where possible, a midwife known to the woman.
12. ANMF supports the legal position that no woman will be permitted to have re-infibulation.² Nurses and midwives must be provided with the necessary skills to provide care, advice and management options for these women.

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References

1. Classification of female genital mutilation. WHO, 2018. Available at <http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/fgm/overview/en/>
2. Female genital mutilation – the prevention of the health complications: policy guidelines for nurses and midwives. WHO, 2001, p11. Available at http://www.who.int/gender/other_health/guidelinesnursesmid.pdf?ua+1.

Note: The World Health Organisation (WHO) definition of re-infibulation is: Re-stitching of an opened up vulva.