Reviewer's report

Title: Female genital mutilation among Iraqi Kurdish women: A cross-sectional study from Erbil city, Iraq

Version: 1 Date: 29 November 2012

Reviewer: Els Leye

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The paper is really interesting, specially because it provides more evidence on the occurrence of FGM among the Kurdish community.

Major revisions

1. Introduction section, page 3: it might be good to add a paragraph in the introduction section on the situation of FGM among Kurdish community.

2. Page 4: the relevance of including the paragraph starting with "the burden and the health consequences ..." is not really clear to me. It gives a brief overview of a number of issues, that are not well elaborated on. The topic of male circumcision, for example, is not really relevant here.

3. Page 4, paragraph 3: the four types should be briefly explained. Moreover, the type called "Sunna" should be carefully explained. The use of the term "sunna" is controversial: it gives a religious connotation to a type of FGM while the link between FGM and religion is non existing. Moreover, the so-called "sunna" type can cover much more than a "mild" form; research has pointed out that sunna can entail incisions, but equally removal of healthy tissue, including stitching.

In the same paragraph, please explain the sentence "there is a tradition...": where is this a tradition? Is this among the Kurdish community studied?

4. Page 4, paragraph four: the statement that "at least 13 countries in Western Europe have legislations against FGM is not correct. in the EU member states, 9 countries have specific criminal laws, there is also a law in Norway, Switzerland.. (which are not member states of the EU).

When you state, "a number of reports", please also refer to more than one reference, or alter the statement to "a report".

5. Page 5, first paragraph: the link between FGM and the differences between rural and urban areas should be more elaborated. The paper states that a significant part of population lives in rural areas, SO FGM is widely practiced in those areas. This causal relation should be explained.

6. page 5, second paragraph: please specify among who you wish to assess the knowledge and attitudes

7. page 6, paragraph 1: if you say: its health impact in addition to the circumcision of the mother, do you mean the health impact according to the type of FGM? please clarify. It should also be specified where the Hawler University is
8. page 6, paragraph 2: please specify the name of the statistical package

9. page 7, paragraph 1: a sentence should be added explaining who did and who did not remember the performer and the age at which it was done. This sentence should come before "Among those who remembered...".

10. page 8, second paragraph: could you please explain how you assessed the said "slight change in attitude"? Were there any measures over time?

11. page 8, third paragraph: I would suggest to include a paragraph to discuss the reliability of self-reporting status of FGM. There are some papers published on this. In the same paragraph, if you state: "Other studies had primarily relied on interview results", do you refer here to the studies mentioned above in that paragraph, or does this refer to other studies?

12. page 9, second paragraph: I would suggest to split the first sentence in two, so to make it more readable. Could you also mention when the efforts were done to pass legislation? Could you also clarify what the Women Supreme Council is? Is it a statutory agency or NGO? In the same paragraph, final sentence: could the sentence "the association between FGM and Islam is completely denied ..." be a bit more explained? Isn't it so that there is controversy among muslim scholars, some rejecting all forms other condoning FGM, etc? Maybe a paragraph to highlight this discussion is in place here.

13. page 9, final paragraph: when you state "it is expected that women deny FGM rather than overreporting", could you explain why?

14. page 10, first paragraph: The disagreement between reporting and examination: could it also not be a possible explanation that women claim they are cut because social pressure is high and stating you are not cut, risks a woman to be ostracised? is there any evidence in literature about that?

15. page 10, second paragraph: there might be a confusion here: it is said that traditional birth attendants do FGM, and that traditional circumcisers have a limited role, while you claim also that TBAs and traditional circumcisors are the same?

16. page 10, third paragraph: it might be good to check WHO's global strategy to curb medicalisation of FGM and include some of the figures of medicalisation from this publication. A discussion on medicalisation is advisable in this paragraph.

17. page 11, second paragraph: please add evidence from literature when you state that type one has few complications. Same paragraph: Is it also not possible that the low rate is due to the fact that women do not link the complications to FGM? Is it possible to retrieve from your data, to reveal in the group that correctly reported their status upon gynecological examination, the complications they have reported?

18. page 11, paragraph 3: if you state that "it is generally agreed that women's education may contribute to a reduction of the practice", is that not a contradiction to this study findings? Final sentence of this paragraph: maybe a reflection might be included here about the decision making processes on FGM:
where lies the power, who decides ultimately to have a girl cut?

19. page 12, second paragraph: could you please rephrase the sentence "mutilated women had nearly two equal opposite opinion on FGM", as this is not clear. Would it be possible to provide evidence from studies, literature, to substantiate the statement "this might be attributed to the increased awareness of the new generation about the health risks"?

20. page 12; the study you refer to from Egypt is rather old (1996). Maybe a brief analysis of the DHS data of Egypt might be good to include here. May I also suggest to include arguments why the paper refers so frequently to Egypt? Is that because the socio-cultural context is quite similar? It would also be good to point out that no DHS data are available on Kurdish community.

21. conclusion: it might also be highlighted what the opinions of the fathers are.

Minor revisions

page 12, first paragraph: I believe this is a repetition of one of the paragraphs above

General: it might be good if the english might be checked: sometimes words are missing, and sentences not clearly formulated.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare I have no competing interests