Author's response to reviews

Title: Female Genital Cutting (FGC) and the Ethics of Care: the need for cultural competency and community engagement at the interface of health and migration

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Dear Editor-in-Chief,

Please find enclosed our manuscript entitled “Female Genital Cutting (FGC) and the Ethics of Care: Cultural Sensitivity and Community Engagement” by Vissandjée B, Denetto S, Migliardi P & Proctor J.

We respectfully submit this manuscript to be considered for review by your expert reviewers at BMC International Health and Human Rights.

We believe our debate paper would appeal to your readership due to its thoughtful discussion of the ethical impact of global health policy concerning FGC on the physical, psychological and emotional health and well-being of millions of girls and women worldwide. The topic of FGC has generated considerable literature in the field of public health; however, in such literature the practice of FGC is often articulated primarily as a form of gender based violence which often results in unjustifiable consequences among girls and women; we believe it must simultaneously be acknowledged that certain public health policies which take condemnation as their central tenant may contribute to the very physical, psychological and emotional harm of women and girls which they seek to mitigate. Policies to address FGC must therefore take the well-being of women and girls as its central focus, which entails considering carefully the socio-cultural constructions of FGC within practicing communities, the impact of criminalization in such contexts, and the cultural incongruence which may cause unintended harm within global systems of care.

To our knowledge, our debate paper is one of few papers on the subject of FGC which uses community based experiential knowledge from a community organization (Sexual Education Resource Centre, SERC) with years of experience working with practicing communities to give voice to the women, girls and community members who are most impacted by public health policy concerning FGC. This foundation adds unique strength to our call for criminalization and condemnation of the practice to be complimented with culturally competent and ethically sensitive community engagement and health and social service provision to ensure the reduction of harm in relation to systems of care, particularly to prevent gendered stigmatization of affected migrants within host countries such as Canada.

This manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. All authors have approved the manuscript and agree with its submission to the BMC International Health and Human Rights.

We have no competing interests to declare. We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience. Please address all correspondence to: bilkis.vissandjee@umontreal.ca

Sincerely yours,
Bilkis Vissandjée, PhD for the team