DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/CUTTING (FGM/C) AND GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE (GAC)

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is a human rights violation that primarily affects children and involves the removal of external female genitalia for non-medical purposes. It is often falsely conflated with gender-affirming care (GAC), a healthcare approach that supports children. This fact sheet aims to address this growing conflation and educate legislators, activists, and the general public about these two separate issues, so they can better understand and articulate the differences between FGM/C and GAC, and advocate for the protection of the rights and well-being of all children involved.

	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting	Gender-Affirming Care
Definition	The partial or total removal of the external female (assigned) genitalia[1], or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.	Highly individualized social, legal, and medical measures that help people feel happy, healthy, and safe in their gender. Interventions can include education about gender and sexuality (appropriate to age and developmental level), parental and family support, social interventions[2], and gender-affirming medical interventions[3].
Mental Health Outcomes	FGM/C often leads to harmful long-term outcomes, including PTSD[4], anxiety, and depression, to name a few.	Gender-affirming care leads to decreased rates of depression, improvement in overall well-being, and minimal long-term side effects.
Bodily Autonomy	Individuals are often forced to undergo FGM/C without their consent[5].	Medical care for transgender individuals is their choice, as part of their right to bodily autonomy[6].

[1] Assigned genitalia: assigned female at birth (AFAB)
[2] Social interventions: including professional support through therapy
[3] Medical interventions: including hormone replacement therapy and surgery
[4] PTSD: post-traumatic stress disorder
[5] Consent: permission for something to happen
[6] Bodily autonomy: the right of an individual to have control over and make decisions about their own body

Understanding the U.S. Federal Law Against FGM/C

U.S. Federal law 18 U.S. Code § 116 'Female Genital Mutilation' (the U.S. federal law banning FGM/C) defines 'female genital mutilation' as any procedure performed for non-medical reasons that involves partial or total removal of, or other injury to, the external female genitalia, and includes the following **types of FGM/C:**

1. a clitoridectomy or the partial or total removal of the clitoris or the prepuce, or the clitoral hood
2. excision or the partial or total removal (with or without excision of the clitoris) of the labia minora or the labia majora, or both
3. infibulation or the narrowing of the vaginal opening (with or without excision of the clitoris)
4. other procedures that are harmful to the external female genitalia, including pricking, incising, scraping, or cauterizing the genital area.

This definition of FGM/C is internationally recognized and clearly describes a specific form of violence, widely understood as a human rights violation, a form of child abuse, gender discrimination, and violence against women and girls.

This definition of FGM/C under the U.S. Federal Law does not include gender-affirming care.

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United Against Female Genital Cutting

END FGM/C
U.S. NETWORK