

**KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES ON
FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM/C) IN
THE WESTGATE CONSERVANCY COMMUNITY
OF SAMBURU**

SAFE KENYA

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Female Genital Mutilation (FGM/C) in Westgate Samburu County

Introduction

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) is defined as all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

The practice is mostly carried out by traditional circumcisers, who often play other central roles in communities, such as attending childbirths.

FGM/C is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. It reflects deep-rooted inequality between the sexes, and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women.

FGM/C has no health benefits, and it harms girls and women in many ways. It involves removing and damaging healthy and normal female genital tissue, and interferes with the natural functions of girls' and women's bodies. The risks increase commensurate with the severity of the cut. Immediate complications can include severe pain, excessive bleeding (hemorrhage), genital tissue swelling, fever, infections e.g., tetanus, urinary problems, wound healing problems, injury to surrounding genital tissue, shock and death.

Long-term consequences can include urinary problems (painful urination, urinary tract infections); vaginal problems (discharge, itching, bacterial vaginosis and other infections); menstrual problems (painful menstruations, difficulty in passing menstrual blood, etc.); scar tissue and keloid (excessive scar tissue growths at the site of scars or injury); sexual problems (pain during intercourse, decreased satisfaction); increased risk of childbirth complications (difficult delivery, excessive bleeding, caesarean section, need to resuscitate the baby, etc.) and newborn deaths; need for later surgeries: for example, the FGM procedure that seals or narrows a vaginal opening (type 3) needs to be cut open later to allow for sexual intercourse and childbirth (deinfibulation). Sometimes genital tissue is stitched again several times, including after childbirth, hence the woman goes through repeated opening and closing procedures, further increasing both immediate and long-term risks; psychological problems (depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, low self-esteem, etc.).

Despite the fact that FGM/C is illegal in Kenya; it is still widely practiced in Samburu, Isiolo, Laikipia and Marsabit counties. 100 percent of the respondents interviewed in the Westgate Conservancy community still practiced FGM/C and according to 58 percent of the respondents FGM/C is not illegal under the Samburu culture with 23 percent in addition to stating that it was not illegal culturally but pointing out the fact that it was illegal under the laws of Kenya.

In Samburu, a land rich in culture and natural resources, human rights are infringed everyday but people are unaware they are being denied their rights since to them it is normal; it is what has been before them; and it is what it will always be after them. Here, girls as young as seven-year-olds are sexually active sometimes with their parents' blessings. Girls get circumcised anytime after reaching 10 years of age, a brutal yet culturally important rite of passage. Young morans (warriors) are not allowed to have sex with circumcised girls therefore seek out younger girls who are not circumcised to quench their sexual desires through a process called 'beading' whereby a moran gives a girl he fancies a gift of beads, which she wears and which marks her as the Moran's property. When this happens, the girl's parents will go an extra mile and build a small *manyatta* [dwelling] for the girl, which she moves into to provide her and her Moran with privacy whenever the Moran chooses to visit her. The possibility of getting pregnant especially when engaging in unprotected and unsafe sex is often very high, thus it is not unusual to see girls as young as nine or ten getting pregnant. When this happens they are forced to undergo abortions. These forced abortions are carried out in the most inhumane and brutal manner that not only result to the death of the fetus but sometimes that of the mother too. If a child is born to a girl who is related (same clan) to the beading moran, then the child will be killed since the moran is considered a brother to the girl and is neither supposed to impregnate or marry her.

Any girl who is not circumcised is looked down upon and considered a child despite her age. Surprisingly, although the girls are aware of the dangers and risks associated with female circumcision and forced marriage, they do not see their rights as being infringed. When the Samburus are told that these actions are against the laws of Kenya they argue otherwise, because to them the only law they follow is their cultural law, traditions and beliefs.

Objectives

The objective of SAFE Kenya is to understand and analyze this data with regard to knowledge, attitudes and practices of the Westgate community on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) in order to be able to build baseline information on FGM/C in the community, and design a performance and workshop based intervention to educate this community.

Methodology

1) Sampling

Systematic sampling was used to select the persons for the survey. An individual from every second household was sampled.

General Characteristics

A total of 100 respondents, 52 male (52 percent) and 48 female (48 percent) (Graph 1) from 8 different locations in Westgate Samburu (Table 1) were interviewed.

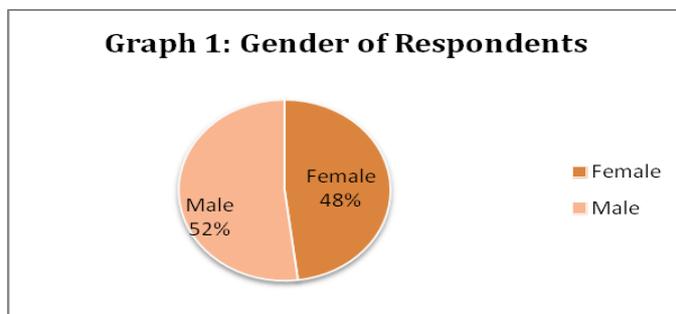
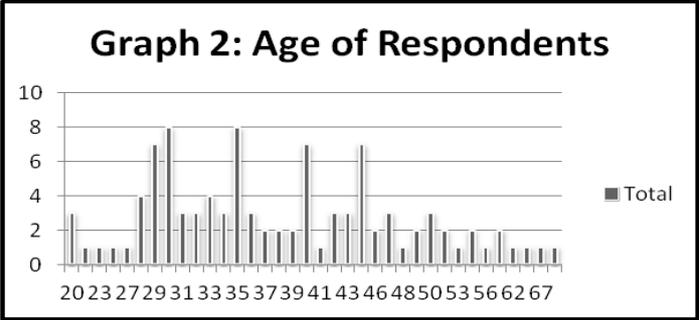


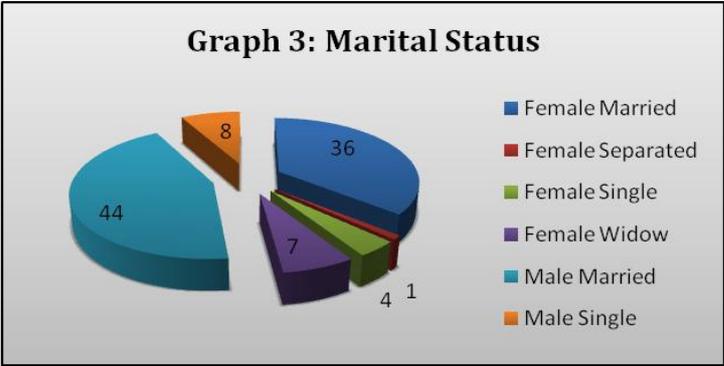
Table 1: Location of Respondents

LOCATION	TOTAL
Kiltamany	9
Lempaute	13
Lpusleluai	12
Naisunyai	16
Ngutuk Ongiron	14
Remot	13
Sasaab	9
Sukuroi	14
Grand Total	100

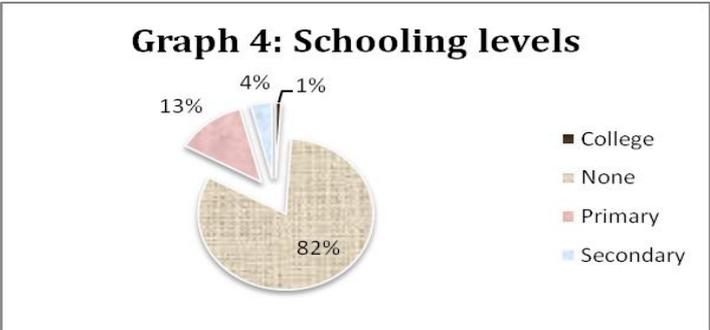
Ages of the respondents varied from 20 to 70 years (Graph 2).



80 respondents were married, 12 were single, 7 were widowed and 1 was separated (Graph 3).



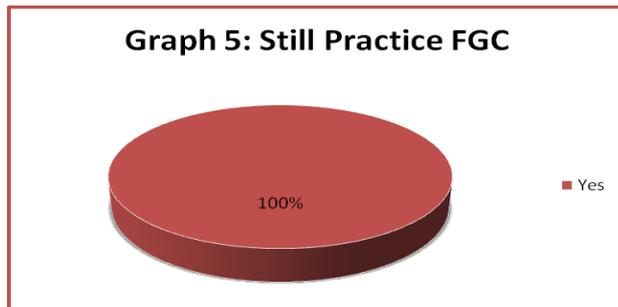
Of the 100 respondents interviewed, only 18 percent of them had some education with only 1 percent having some college education; 4 percent secondary; and 13 percent primary education. The remaining respondents (82 percent) did not have any formal education (Graph 4).



RESULTS

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) practice in the community

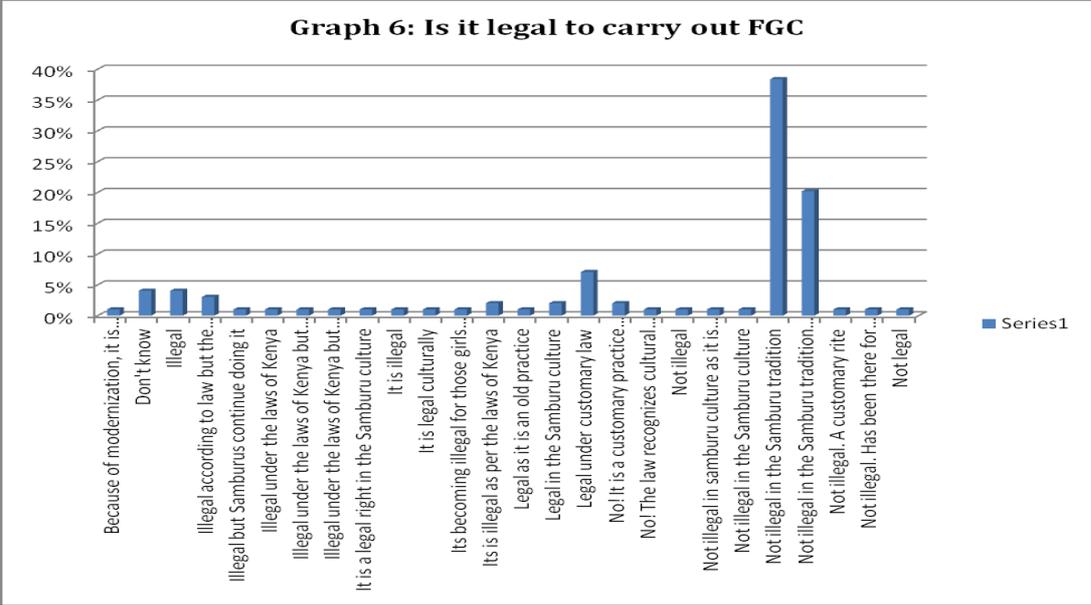
All respondents interviewed still practice FGM/C (Graph 5). This shows how rampant and widespread the practice is among the Samburu people despite being declared illegal by the Kenyan government in 2011.



The main reason for the continued practice of FGM/C is that it is an age old traditional/customary practice which has become part of the Samburu community thus the people cannot detach themselves from it or violate or go against it since this is thought to bring a bad omen/curse to the community. The practice is also done for marriage purposes and uncircumcised girls cannot get married in the community since they are considered immature and unclean. FGM/C is also done to reduce the 'libido' or sexual urges of girls. This is believed to control sexual behaviour among girls and reduce prostitution in the community. The other reason as to why FGM/C is practiced is to transition girls from childhood to adulthood. Circumcised girls can attend cultural ceremonies which uncircumcised are not allowed to attend. Uncircumcised girls are also considered 'outcasts' and their babies are always killed to avoid bringing bad omens to the community. FGM/C is also a source of pride to the parents of the circumcised girl especially the father.

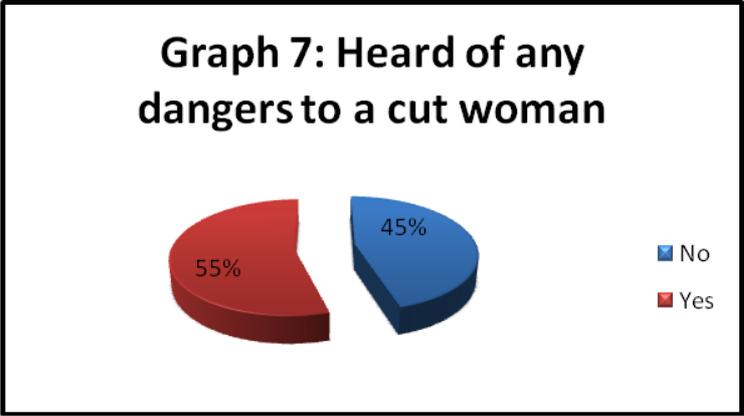
Is it illegal to carry out FGC?

In 2011, Kenya introduced the anti-FGM law (Prohibition of FGM Act, 2011). Despite these and several years since its introduction, FGM/C is still widely practiced among the Samburu people for the reasons previously mentioned. What is surprising is that the community according to the response from respondents know that practicing FGM/C is illegal under the laws of Kenya. However, they say that culturally the practice is allowed. Out of the 100 respondents interviewed, 58 percent responded that FGM/C was not illegal in the Samburu culture and 23 percent in addition to stating that it was not illegal culturally pointed out the fact that it was illegal by the laws of Kenya. Only about 15 percent of the respondents were affirmative that practicing FGM/C was illegal and 4 percent did not know whether it was legal or not (Graph 6).



Dangers of FGM/C

FGM/C has no health benefits at all, and it harms girls and women in many ways. The risks increase with the increasing severity of the procedure. About 55 percent of the respondents interviewed have heard of the dangers faced by cut women. Interestingly, about 45 percent of the respondents have not heard of any dangers cut women face (Graph 7).



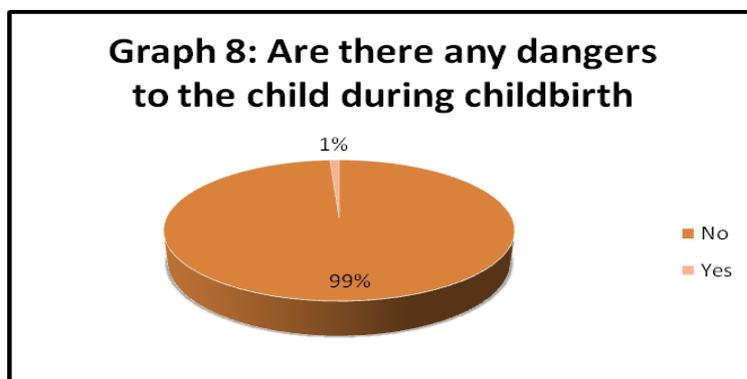
There are many dangers -both immediate and long-term- associated with FGM/C. Dangers mentioned by the respondents included:

- Excessive bleeding immediately after the cut and during childbirth. This sometimes may be fatal causing death.
- Problems at childbirth including prolonged labour
- Trauma faced by victims of FGM/C

- General body weakness, ‘laziness’, stomach problems and backache problems for cut girls
- Destruction of certain nerves and accidental removal of certain parts of the vagina during the cut
- Injury in the scar during the time of delivery

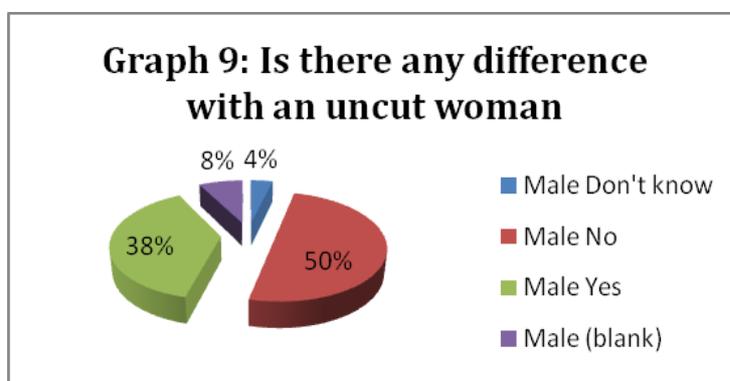
Dangers to the child during childbirth

FGM/C increases the risk of the child dying during or just after birth. However, only 1 percent of the respondents interviewed know this fact. 99 percent of the respondents did not see any dangers to the child during childbirth as a result of the cut (Graph 8).



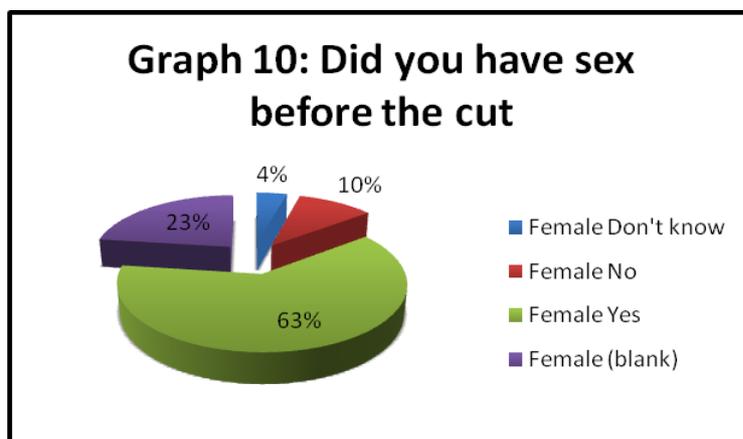
Does sex feel different with cut women?

One of the reasons why Samburu cut girls and women is to lessen their sexual libido. 50 percent of the men interviewed do not see any difference between cut and uncut women when it comes to sex (Graph 9). However, about 38 percent of the respondents say there is a difference with uncut woman in that the uncut ones enjoy sex more than the cut ones. The respondents also say uncut women have a high libido. They also say cut women have little or no ‘feelings’ and will need more sex for them to get satisfied.



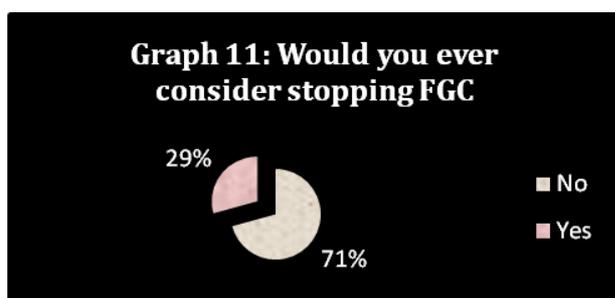
Was sex different before the cut?

Many girls in the Samburu community are sexually active at a very tender age and the majority experience their first sexual encounters when they are as young as seven years old before the cut at around the age of 10 years. About 63 percent of the women respondents interviewed had sex before the cut and only 29 percent of them say it was more enjoyable then than it was after the cut. 38 percent of the women interviewed did not feel any difference before and after the cut. Only about 10 percent had not had sex before the cut. 4 percent of the women respondents did not know whether they had sex prior to the cut or not. 23 percent of the women interviewed chose to ignore responding to this query (Graph 10).



Stopping FGM/C at individual level

Female genital cutting is an age old practice deeply rooted in the Samburu culture that no one is willing to stop, despite its inherent dangers and having being outlawed in 2011. 71 percent of the respondents interviewed would not consider stopping FGM/C (Graph 11).

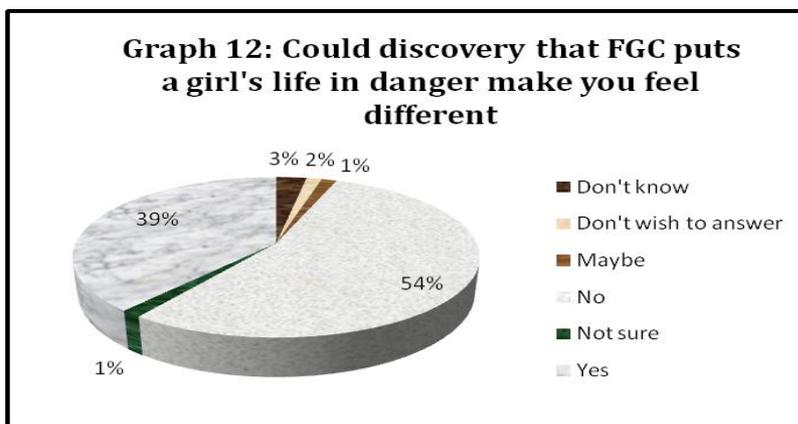


Only 29 percent of the respondents would consider stopping FGM/C and that decision would be based on various factors as below:

- Awareness creation on the dangers of FGM/C
- If elders and everyone else in the community agree to stop it

- If women are allowed to decide on their own
- Pressure from government and NGOs who are trying to stop the practice

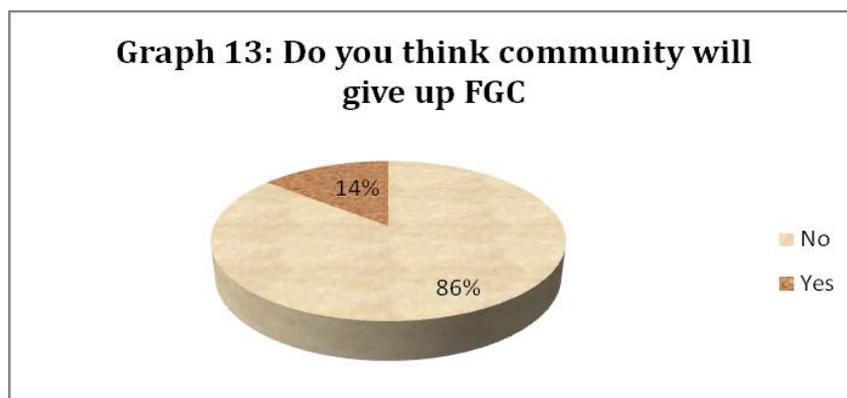
For the 71 percent who would not consider stopping the cut, 54 percent of them would still not feel different or change their mind with the discovery that FGM/C can put a girl’s life and any children she might have in danger (Graph 12). The main reason is that FGM/C is an old practice that must be followed strictly. Other reasons include the fact that the community have not seen or heard of any dangers associated with it. For others they will only change their minds if they themselves experienced the dangers or if the reality of the dangers is explained to them, or if all the Samburus agreed to abandon the practice.



About 39 percent of the respondents would change their minds or feel different about FGM/C if educated on the dangers, and if explained to whether the dangers are real or not. Also for some, if all the Samburu community decided to stop the practice then they would change their minds.

Stopping FGM/C at community level

Despite FGM/C having been outlawed in 2011, the Samburus in Westgate community still practice it and believe that they will continue practicing it. According to 86 percent of the respondents, the community will not give up on FGM/C (Graph 13).



The reasons for this include;

- FGM/C is a cultural practice that has existed for so long that it should not be abandoned. It is a taboo to abandon the practice. The community fears losing their cultural identity.
- Stopping FGM/C is going against the culture which will invite a curse to the community
- Uncut girls will not get married since men in the community do not marry uncut girls
- Uncut girls are considered immature and unclean and cannot attend cultural ceremonies
- There will be no ceremonies if the practice is stopped
- Circumcisers will lose their business
- Uncut girls are considered outcasts in the community
- Prostitution will increase in the community

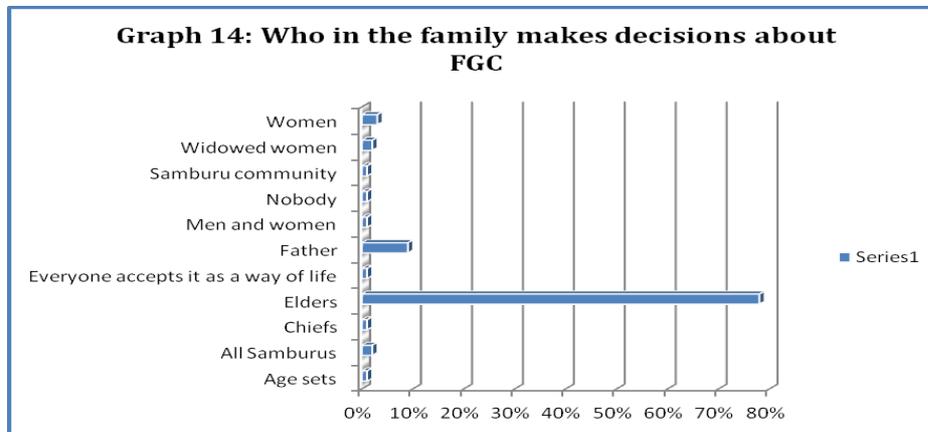
Only 14 percent of the respondents feel the community will give up on FGM/C for the following reasons;

- Dangers and problems associated with FGM/C including excessive bleeding
- Education whereby educated people are against the cultural practice which the rest of the community still want to continue practicing
- A harmful practice that does not help at all; a torture to girls
- Government and NGOs are against the practice
- People are getting educated and sensitized on the dangers of the practice through seminars and trainings on FGM/C and will soon stop it to avoid taking any risks
- Sensitization on the Kenyan law which prohibits the practice will also make people stop practicing it.

Decision making in the family on FGM/C

Decisions concerning FGM/C are largely made and determined by elders in the Samburu community since FGM/C is a cultural practice that everyone has to adhere to. According to 78 percent of the respondents, elders have the responsibility of deciding on FGM/C issues. Fathers

(parents) do not have much say on the FGM/C issue even if it concerns their own families and only 9 percent of the respondents said fathers are the ones who make decisions in the family concerning FGC (graph 14).



Comments from the Respondents on FGM/C

The respondents were also asked to say any comments they had after the interview. Below are some of the comments from the respondents some of them in form of questions to SAFE.

- Why do you want to stop FGM/C?
- Why do you want FGM/C stopped yet we don't know the effects?
- Why do you want the Samburus to go against their culture passed to them by their ancestors for for no reason?
- Why is it illegal in Kenya to practice FGM/C?
- What are the dangers of FGM/C? Are they real?
- What is the issue around FGM/C?
- What is the reason why we should stop FGM/C?
- Cutting girls is not illegal as it is culture
- Community has not seen any dangers of FGM/C and have no reason to stop it
- It will take time for FGM/C to end unless government enforces the laws prohibiting it
- If women had been empowered in the community, they could decide to stop it
- More education is needed in the community if FGM/C has to be stopped

Conclusions and Recommendations

Female Genital Mutilation Cutting (FGM/C) is an old practice that the majority of the Samburus in the Westgate community are not keen on stopping any time soon for any reason whatsoever. This is largely because the majority of them are not aware of the dangers to girls both during and after the cut and also during childbirth.

Kenya passed a law in 2011 outlawing FGM/C. The majority of the Samburus understand that it is illegal to perform the practice under the laws of Kenya, however, they still hold on the believe that FGM/C is a traditional practice therefore accepted under customary practices.

There is need to educate and sensitize the community in Westgate on the dangers of female genital cutting- both the immediate and long-term dangers. This can be done by using case studies of people who have had first-hand experience of the negative consequences of the cut. Lessons from other regions that have successfully discouraged communities from FGM/C can also be adopted in educating and sensitizing the community on FGM/C. Case studies will be most appropriate since the community does not believe in any dangers associated with FGM/C as they have not heard or seen any. Another way can be through a cultural approach using Samburu songs to discuss the issue. SAFE Maa has successfully used this approach in Loita which proved critical as it allowed people to feel that the change was coming from within the community.

Sensitizing the community on the law prohibiting FGM/C is also required. The community know it is illegal under the law to perform the cut. However, that has not been enough to stop the practice since they believe that under customary practices, FGM/C is accepted and not a violation of any laws.

Alternative Rites of Passage (ARP's) for girls that are not detrimental to their health and well-being can also be introduced into the community.

The challenge which is most likely to occur while trying to discourage the practice (which has occurred elsewhere in other communities and in the world) is that communities who are against changing or stopping the practice will continue to practice it secretly.