FGM/C and ECM: Drawing Lessons from Research

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Introduction

- Global consensus: FGM/C and ECM as gendered, socially endorsed harmful practices*.

- Female genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) often linked to marriageability and thought to be associated with Early/Child Marriage (ECM)

  - ECM and FGM/C may operate alone, in combination or collectively
    ✓ But little rigorous research to clarify the relationship between FGM/C & ECM to inform policy, programming and investment.
What are we learning from the FGM/C Research programme? “Investments need to be evidence based”

- Understand the geography and pattern of practice key for targeting investment
  - Critical to highlight sub-national level data, identify hot spots/areas of risk.

- Provide rigorous evidence:
  - “Cultural” practices evolve; shifting discourses and norms, & underpinning structures.
  - Intervention elements that make a difference

- Measurement challenges: understanding the how & efficacy of complex interventions.

- Legislation: a challenged and mixed record
What does the Evidence say about links between ECM and FGM/C?

Recent Demographic and Health survey (DHS) and Multiple Cluster Survey (MICS) data for 10 Sub-Saharan countries and review of the literature

❖ **Prevalence**: Significant variations in national, sun-national & ethnic groups - by country.

❖ **Associations**: Between ECM and FGM/C vary by country, along with predictors for each.
  - Dynamics in which practices occur vary
  - Contextual realities: some settings one practice in decline, in another sustained or rising.
  - In most of our study countries could be a prerequisite.

❖ **Similarities** in causes and underlying drivers:
  - Affords social capital
  - Maintenance of chastity
  - Gendered relational practices based on power structures.
What are the Implications?

More evidence needed on the best strategies for supporting abandonment of ECM and FGM/C including:

1. Knowledge of the drivers and consequences of FGMC & ECM in **specific contexts**, to build a detailed understanding that also enables generalizations

2. Impact of FGM/C and ECM interventions on wider gender norms, which requires strengthened monitoring and evaluation frameworks and systems

3. Need for more **attention to theory-based intervention** and evaluation designs

4. Improved **coordination** among advocates, implementers, policymakers and researchers
What are the opportunities for convergence between FGMC and ECM?

❖ FGM/C a precursor in some context for ECM but not in other contexts.
❖ In contexts where both practices prevalent may not always be strongly associated…..

HOWEVER:

- Both perceived as having important roles that range from “securing the well being and physical security of daughters; and/or securing family honour; and/or offering social and economic advantage to families; and/or enabling transition to adulthood…. *But in ways that sustain some of the structural injustices that girls and women may experience.*
What are the opportunities for convergence between FGMC and ECM?

❖ Variations and complexities of local realities means approaches can’t be standard:

BUT:

▪ Secondary education an enabling condition: *Educated mothers likely to keep children in school & not support FGM/C or ECM. Enabled delayed marriage;*
  
  ✓ Tested Intervention packages*: educational interventions (provision of school materials, conditional cash transfers, community conversations on social norms) have high quality results but are they sustainable? Do they translate into livelihood security?

❖ Laws provide support for abandonment of FGMC & ECM: - Infrastructural responses required?
Conclusion

*Lesson:*

Our improved understanding of the emerging structural factors that underpin and/or sustain FGM/C are beginning to clarify the mechanisms of action required, & call for more multi-sectoral intervention designs.
The Evidence to End FGM/C programme consortium generates evidence to inform and influence investments, policies, and programs for ending female genital mutilation/cutting in different contexts.

Evidence to End FGM/C is led by the Population Council in partnership with the Africa Coordination Centre for Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (Kenya); Gender and Reproductive Health & Rights Centre (Sudan); MannionDaniels, Ltd.; Population Reference Bureau; University of California, San Diego; and University of Washington. Evidence to End FGM/C is funded by UK aid by the UK Government.