

## Female Genital Cutting in Jimma Zone

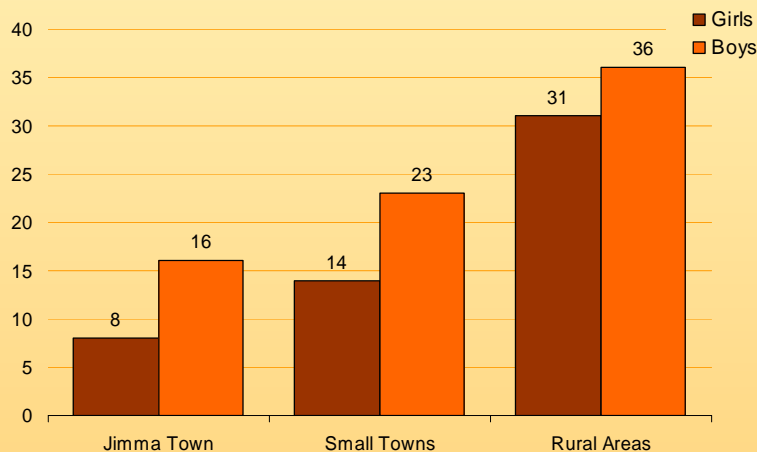
This Policy Brief examines attitudes about female genital cutting (FGC) among adolescent boys and girls.

*Based on data from Round 1 (September 2005-March 2006) of the Jimma Longitudinal Family Survey of Youth*

Female genital cutting (FGC), also called female genital mutilation or female circumcision, refers to all procedures that involve the partial or total removal of the female genitalia for cultural reasons or by tradition. It is frequently argued that FGC is a symptom of structural inequality of women and violates universally accepted human-rights principles. In Ethiopia, 80% of adolescents girls and young women experience FGC. Acute complications of FGC include death, hemorrhage, shock, infection and severe pain. In addition, women can suffer severe long-term damage to their reproductive and sexual health, are at a higher risk of HIV infection, and are often left with psychological scars.

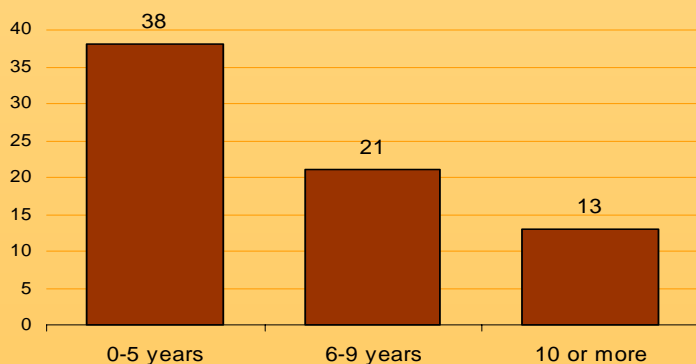
What is the level of support for the continuation of FGC among youth? What are the factors that promote the acceptability of FGC? Does gender empowerment have any effect on the prevention of the practice?

### Percent support for FGC among adolescent boys and girls by area of residence



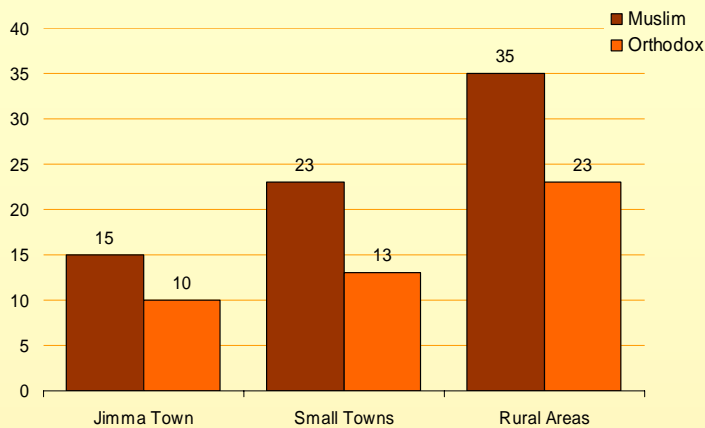
Support for FGC is strongest in rural areas and weakest in urban areas. In all places boys are more favorable towards FGC than girls, but only a minority of boys and girls support the continuation of FGC. However, traditional emphasis on FGC has far from disappeared in rural Ethiopia, with nearly one third of adolescents supporting the practice.

### Percent support for FGC by household education level



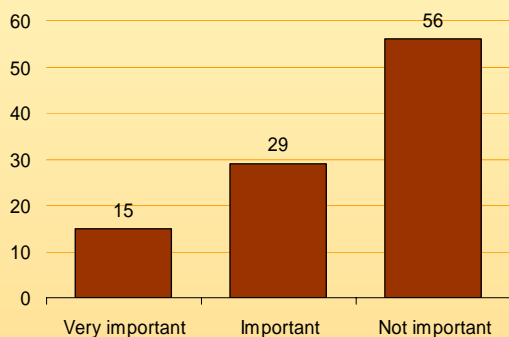
Support for FGC is strongest among adolescents in households where the level of education is low. As these adolescents become household heads, the level of household education will increase, and support for FGC should decline.

## Percent support for FGC by religion and area of residence



Muslims are more favorable to FGC than Orthodox Christians, with largest support found among Muslims in rural areas, where just over one-third of adolescents support FGC. However, even among Muslims there is considerable variation in support for FGC by place of residence.

## Importance boys place on FGC status in choosing a wife



It appears that most boys do not feel that a woman's circumcision status is important in choosing a wife. The declining importance of female circumcision in preferences for a wife should help to discourage FGC.

## Policy Recommendations

Most adolescent girls in Jimma Zone have experienced the traditional form of female genital cutting. Female genital mutilation is variously justified as controlling women's sexual appetite and unstable emotions, as a hygienic measure, or out of respect for tradition or religious requirements, even though a growing number of religious leaders condemn FGC. A substantial majority of adolescents in Jimma Zone are opposed to FGC. This is true across all ethnic and religious groups. Lingering support for FGC is found only among adolescents whose parents have very low levels of education and live in rural places. While it is too late to stop FGC among adolescent girls, educational interventions can discourage these girls from practicing FGC on their own daughters in the future. Additionally, young mothers and fathers should be made aware of changing attitudes and decreased support for FGC, particularly in regards to girls' future marriageability.

## The Jimma Longitudinal Family Survey of Youth

The Jimma Longitudinal Family Survey of Youth (JLFSY) began in 2005. It is representative of Jimma Town, the small towns of Yebu, Serbo, and Sheki, and nearby rural areas. The stratified sample includes 3700 households and 2100 boys and girls ages 13 to 17, yielding about 700 adolescents each for Jimma Town, the small towns, and the rural areas. Household data were collected from the household head or the spouse of the head. Adolescents were directly interviewed. Questionnaire data were collected by trained interviewers in the Amharic and Oromifa languages.



Jimma Zone in Ethiopia

The JLFSY is an interdisciplinary effort by specialists in epidemiology, community health, biostatistics, demography, sociology, and economics. The study examines critical challenges that youth face such as health, education and training, employment and earnings, forming families, and becoming productive citizens. A special focus of the study is on key sources of support for youth as they meet these challenges including parent and kin investments, household resources, parent and kin guidance, local community infrastructure, and informal support networks.

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This research is being conducted by faculty and students affiliated with the **Partnership in Improving Reproductive Health**.



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