

# Iraqi Kurdistan



42.8%<sup>1</sup>

## Key Findings

The prevalence of FGM in women aged 15–49 is 42.8%.  
83.6% of women aged 15–49 who have heard of FGM believe that it should be discontinued.<sup>2</sup>

### **Geography:**

Prevalence is highest in the south and east of Kurdistan<sup>3</sup>

### **Age:**

Most girls are cut between 0 and 12 years; the average age is 4–5 years<sup>4</sup>

### **Type:**

Type 1 FGM is most commonly performed<sup>5</sup>

### **Agent:**

Around half of FGM cases are carried out by traditional birth attendants<sup>6</sup>

## Development Indicators

**Population:** Approximately six million

**Infant Mortality Rate:** 23 deaths per 1,000 live births (2019)<sup>7</sup>

**Maternal Mortality Ratio:** 79 deaths per 100,000 live births (entirety of Iraq, 2017)<sup>8</sup>

**Literacy:** 79% and 78% of the population aged 15 and over can read and write, respectively<sup>9</sup>

*'I tell these women: This is violence that you're carrying out with your own hands — women against women.'*  
~ Rasul, Iraqi Kurdish activist with WADI<sup>10</sup>

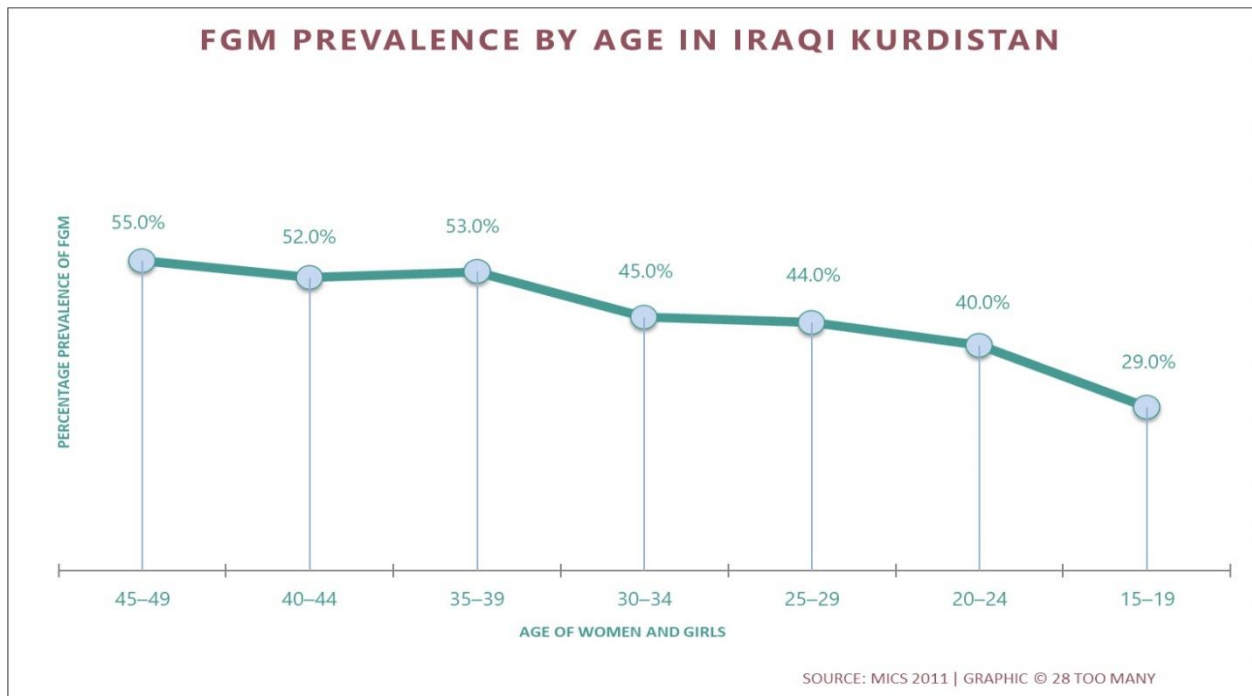
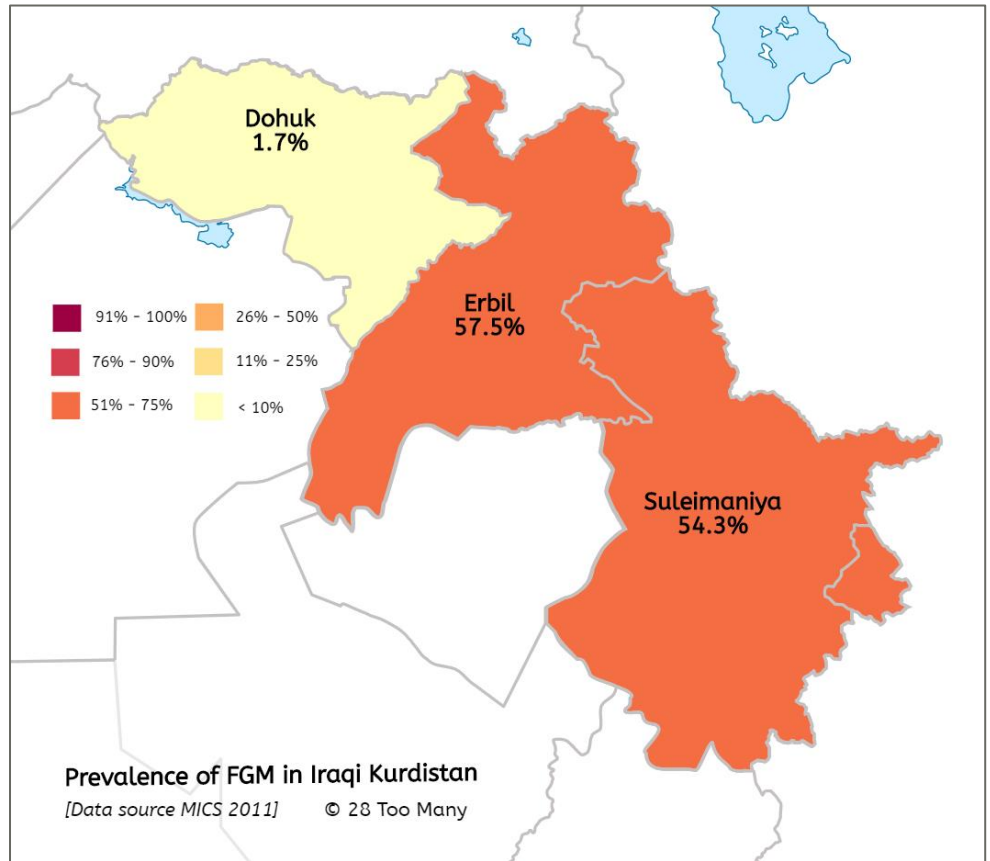
## Prevalence

Two of Kurdistan’s governorates – Suleimaniya and Erbil – have an FGM prevalence of more than 50%. These are the most southern and eastern governorates of Kurdistan. The third governorate of Dohuk in the north has a low FGM prevalence of 1.7%.<sup>11</sup>

There is little difference between the FGM prevalence in urban (43%) and rural (42%) areas. Women with no formal or only basic educations are more likely to have had FGM (55%) than women with secondary or higher levels of education (33%).<sup>12</sup>

Women in the lowest wealth quintile are more likely to have been cut (57%) than those in the highest wealth quintile (26%).<sup>13</sup>

86.1% of women have heard of FGM. Although the last MICS survey stated that 83.6% of women believe that FGM should be stopped, attitudes appear to vary: there is greater support for the practice among those with lower levels of education.<sup>14</sup> In the majority of cases, it is reported that mothers make the decisions around FGM, and in more than half of cases religion is cited as the reason for the practice.<sup>15</sup>



Measurements of FGM prevalence prior to 2013 were restricted to women who had been married at any time, meaning that a direct comparison cannot be made. However, breaking down the most recent data by age group shows that the prevalence among women aged 45–49 is 55%, while among the youngest age group this has fallen to 29%. Despite the fact that a small proportion of women may be cut after the age of 15, the data suggests a trend towards less frequent cutting among younger women.<sup>16</sup>

## Iraqi Kurdistan Law

FGM was criminalised by Kurdish authorities under the Domestic Violence Act in 2011. Prison sentences and/or fines are included for FGM, but enforcement is reportedly weak.

- 1 (**'MICS'**): The Central Statistics Organization and the Kurdistan Statistics Office (2012) *Iraq Multiple Index Cluster Survey 2011, Final Report*, pp.159–163. Baghdad, Iraq: The Central Statistics Organization and the Kurdistan Regional Statistics Office. Available at [https://mics-surveys-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/MICS4/Middle%20East%20and%20North%20Africa/Iraq/2011/Final/Iraq%202011%20MICS\\_English.pdf](https://mics-surveys-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/MICS4/Middle%20East%20and%20North%20Africa/Iraq/2011/Final/Iraq%202011%20MICS_English.pdf).
- 2 MICS, p.160 and 162.
- 3 MICS, p.160.
- 4 Rozhgar A. Saleem, Nasih Othman, Fattah H. Fattah, Luma Hazim and Berivan Adnan (2013) 'Female Genital Mutilation in Iraqi Kurdistan: Description and Associated Factors', *Woman and Health*, 53(6), pp.537–551.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*, p.453.
- 7 Kurdistan Regional Statistics Office, International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Population Fund (2018) *Demographic Survey: Kurdistan Region of Iraq*. Available at [https://iraq.iom.int/files/KRSO\\_IOM\\_UNFPA\\_Demographic\\_Survey\\_Kurdistan\\_Region\\_of\\_Iraq.pdf](https://iraq.iom.int/files/KRSO_IOM_UNFPA_Demographic_Survey_Kurdistan_Region_of_Iraq.pdf) (accessed 25 June 2020).
- 8 World Health Organization (2017) Maternal mortality ratio (per 100 000 live births). Available at [https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/maternal-mortality-ratio-\(per-100-000-live-births\)](https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/maternal-mortality-ratio-(per-100-000-live-births)) (accessed 25 June 2020).
- 9 Kurdistan Regional Statistics Office, International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Population Fund, *op. cit.*
- 10 Rasul cited in Agence France-Presse (2019) 'Women Strive to End Genital Mutilation in Kurdish Iraq', *VOA*, 2 January. Available at <https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/women-strive-end-genital-mutilation-kurdish-iraq> (accessed 31 July 2020).
- 11 MICS, p.160.
- 12 Calculated from the original MICS dataset.
- 13 Calculated from the original MICS dataset.
- 14 MICS, p.162.
- 15 WADI – Association for Crisis Assistance and Development Co-operation (2010) *Female Genital Mutilation in Iraqi Kurdistan: An Empirical Study by WADI*, p.19. Available at [https://www.28toomany.org/static/media/uploads/Continent%20Research%20and%20Resources/Middle%20East/study\\_fgm\\_iraqi\\_kurdistan\\_en.pdf](https://www.28toomany.org/static/media/uploads/Continent%20Research%20and%20Resources/Middle%20East/study_fgm_iraqi_kurdistan_en.pdf) (accessed 26 June 2020).
- 16 Calculated from the original MICS dataset.

### **Images on website:**

- 1 Kurdistan (2010) *untitled*, 2 February. Available at <https://flic.kr/p/7A1WGn>. CCL: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>.
- 2 Enno Lenze (2019) *DSC09021*, 27 March. Available at <https://flic.kr/p/2ffQK3E>. CCL: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/>.
- 3 Enno Lenze (2019) *DSC09323*, 27 March. Available at <https://flic.kr/p/2dWCM4X>. CCL: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/>.