

# Sierra Leone

89.6%<sup>1</sup>



## Key Findings

The prevalence of FGM in women aged 15-49 is 89.6%.

FGM is closely linked with the Bondo secret society, as it is part of the initiation ritual.

69.2% of women and 46.3% of men in the same age-range believe that the practice should continue.<sup>2</sup>

### **Geography:**

The Northern region has the highest prevalence, at 96.3%, and the Western the lowest, at 75.6%<sup>3</sup>

### **Age:**

40.2% of women aged 15-49 who have undergone FGM were cut between the ages of 10 and 14<sup>4</sup>

### **Type:**

'Cut, flesh removed' is the most common type of FGM practised<sup>5</sup>

### **Agent:**

Almost all instances of FGM are performed by traditional cutters<sup>6</sup>

## Development Indicators

**HDI Rank:** 179 out of 188 countries (2015)<sup>7</sup>

**Population:** 6,725,664 (as at 1 May 2017), with a 2.75% growth rate (2016 est.)<sup>8</sup>

**Infant Mortality Rate:** 87 deaths per 1,000 live births (2015)<sup>9</sup>

**Maternal Mortality Ratio:** 1,306 deaths per 100,000 live births (2015)<sup>10</sup>

**Literacy:** 48.1% of the total population aged 15 and over can read/write<sup>11</sup>

*'We want the government to clearly ban this practice. ...  
This has no place in Sierra Leone in this 21st century.'  
~ Aminata Koroma, secretary of the forum against  
harmful traditional practices in Sierra Leone<sup>12</sup>*

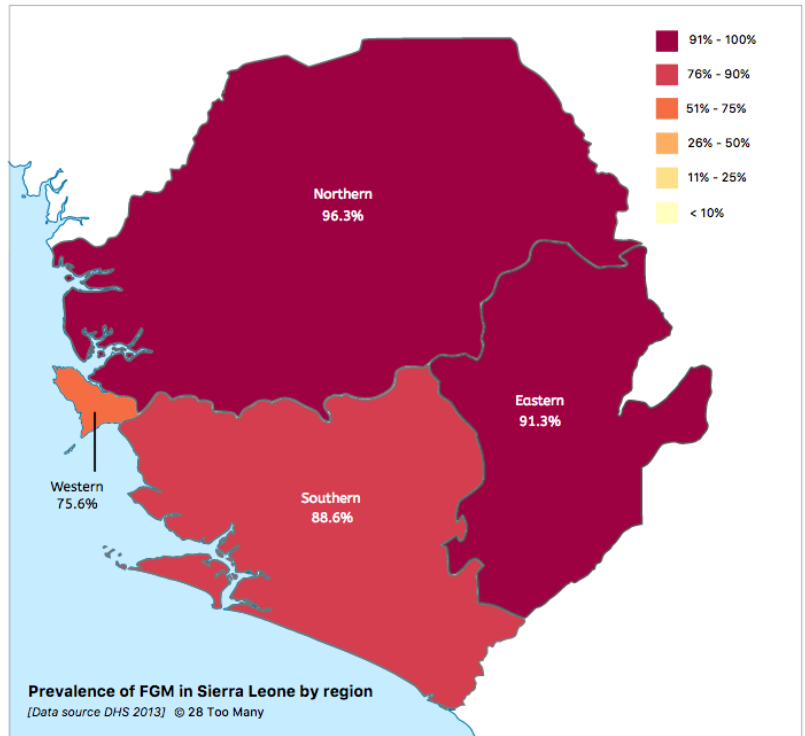
## Prevalence

FGM in Sierra Leone is closely linked with the Bondo secret society, as it is part of the initiation ritual into that society.

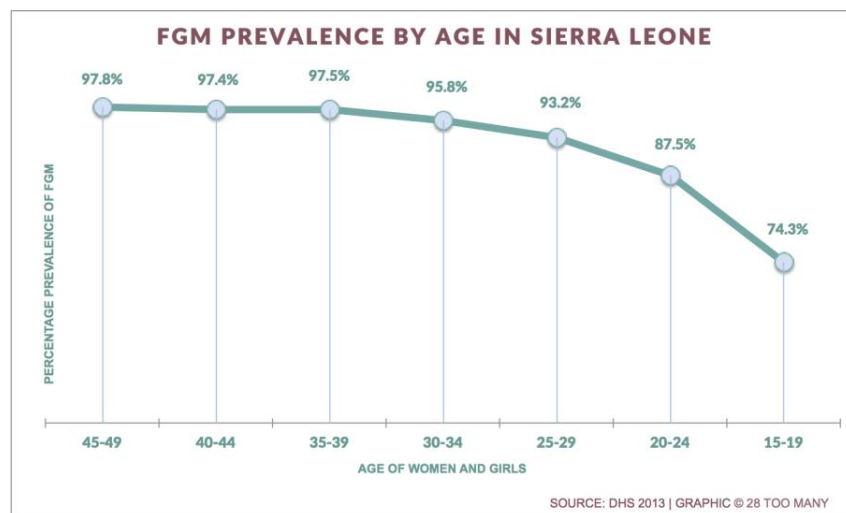
The district with the highest FGM prevalence is Kambia, in the north (97.1% of women aged 15-49). The district with the lowest prevalence is Western Area Urban, in the far west (74.1%). FGM is more prevalent among women living in rural areas (94.3%) than among those living in urban areas (80.9%).

Prevalence is inversely correlated with a woman's level of education, but is relatively unaffected by the wealth quintile in which a woman falls, unless she is in the highest wealth quintile, in which prevalence drops from 90% or more to 76.9% for women aged 15-49.

55.6% of women and 47.0% of men aged 15-49 believe that FGM is required by their religion, and 69.2% of women and 46.3% of men in the same age-range believe that the practice should continue.<sup>13</sup>



Between 2008 and 2013, the overall prevalence for women aged 15-49 fell from 91.3% to 89.6%. Due to the large age-range of women included, however, the overall prevalence alone may not fully reflect the progress that has been made in recent years. Breaking down the most recent data by age group shows that the prevalence for women aged 45-49 is 97.8%, while for the youngest age group this has fallen to 74.3%. Despite the fact that a proportion of women may be cut after the age of 15, the data demonstrates a trend towards lower prevalences for younger women.<sup>14</sup>



## Sierra Leonean Law

The Government of Sierra Leone to date has not passed legislation that prohibits the practice of FGM. A nationwide ban of FGM was declared in November 2014, due to the ebola crisis. In 2015, when Sierra Leone was declared ebola free, President Ernest Bai Koroma stated that he hoped traditional practices that were discontinued during the outbreak would not be returned to. Unfortunately, this has not been the case.<sup>15</sup>

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- 1 (**'DHS'**): Statistics Sierra Leone (SSL) and ICF International (2014) *Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2013*, p.301. Freetown, Sierra Leone and Rockville, Maryland, USA: SSL and ICF International. Available at <http://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR297/FR297.pdf> (accessed 23 May 2017).
  - 2 DHS, pp.301 & 305.
  - 3 DHS, p.301.
  - 4 DHS, p.302.
  - 5 DHS, p.301.
  - 6 (**'DHS 2008'**): Statistics Sierra Leone (SSL) and ICF Macro (2009) *Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2008*, p.258. Calverton, Maryland, USA: Statistics Sierra Leone (SSL) and ICF Macro. Available at <http://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR225/FR225.pdf> (accessed 23 May 2017).
  - 7 United Nations Development Programme (2015) *Human Development Index*. Available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/137506> (accessed 16 May 2017).
  - 8 - Country Meters (2017) *Sierra Leone*, 23 May 2017. Available at [http://countrymeters.info/en/Sierra\\_Leone](http://countrymeters.info/en/Sierra_Leone) (accessed 23 May 2017).  
- Central Intelligence Agency (2017) *World Factbook: Sierra Leone*, 1 May. Available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sl.html> (accessed 23 May 2017).
  - 9 Countdown to 2030 (2015) *A Decade of Tracking Progress for Maternal, Newborn and Child Survival The 2015 Report: Sierra Leone*. Available at [http://countdown2030.org/documents/2015Report/Sierra\\_Leone\\_2015.pdf](http://countdown2030.org/documents/2015Report/Sierra_Leone_2015.pdf) (accessed 23 May 2017).
  - 10 WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and United Nations Population Division Maternal Mortality Estimation Inter-Agency Group (2015) *Maternal mortality in 1990-2015: Sierra Leone*. Available at [http://www.who.int/gho/maternal\\_health/countries/sle.pdf?ua=1](http://www.who.int/gho/maternal_health/countries/sle.pdf?ua=1) (accessed 1 May 2017).
  - 11 Central Intelligence Agency, *op. cit.*
  - 12 Alpha Kamara (2016) 'Anti-FGM activists struggle to be heard in Sierra Leone', *Anadolu Agency*, 4 September. Available at <http://aa.com.tr/en/africa/anti-fgm-activists-struggle-to-be-heard-in-sierra-leone-/640883> (accessed 25 May 2017).
  - 13 DHS, pp.301, 303 & 305.
  - 14 - DHS, p.301.  
- DHS 2008, p.256.
  - 15 Olivia Acland (2016) 'Ebola Ended FGM in Sierra Leone, but Now It's Back', *Vice News*, 22 March. Available at <https://news.vice.com/article/ebola-ended-fgm-in-sierra-leone-but-now-its-back> (accessed 6 July 2017).

**UNICEF Statistical Profile on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting:**

UNICEF (2016) *Sierra Leone: Statistical Profile on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting*. Available at [https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/country\\_profiles/Sierra%20Leone/FGMC\\_SLE.pdf](https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/country_profiles/Sierra%20Leone/FGMC_SLE.pdf) (accessed 23 May 2017).

**Images on website:**

- 1 robertonencini (2013) *Yongoro, Sierra Leone – June 02, 2013: West Africa, the village of Yongoro in front of Freetown, portrait of woman*. Shutterstock ID 458634991.
- 2 robertonencini (2013) *Yongoro, Sierra Leone - June 03, 2013: West Africa, the village of Yongoro in front of Freetown, in front of his house preparing food for the family*. Shutterstock ID 460826281.
- 3 robertonencini (2013) *Yongoro, Sierra Leone - June 03, 2013: West Africa, the village of Yongoro in front of Freetown, portrait of young girl*. Shutterstock ID 460865173.