

SHORT REPORT:
FGC in the Philippines
July 2024



About Orchid Project

Orchid Project is a UK- and Kenya-based non-governmental organisation (NGO) catalysing the global movement to end female genital cutting (FGC). Its strategy for 2023 to 2028 focuses on three objectives:

1. to undertake research, generate evidence and curate knowledge to better equip those working to end FGC;
2. to facilitate capacity-strengthening of partners, through learning and knowledge-sharing, to improve programme designs and impacts for the movement to end FGC; and
3. to steer global and regional policies, actions and funding towards ending FGC.

Orchid Project's aim to expedite the building of a knowledge base for researchers and activists is being fulfilled in the **FGM/C Research Initiative**.

About ARROW

The Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women is a non-profit women's NGO with a consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and an observer status with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, ARROW has been working since 1993 to champion women and young people's sexual and reproductive rights. ARROW occupies a strategic niche in the Asia-Pacific region and is a Global South-based, feminist, and women-led organisation that focuses on the equality, gender, health, and human rights of women.

About Asia Network to End FGM/C

The Asia Network to End Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) is a group of civil-society actors, led by Orchid Project and ARROW, working across Asia to end all forms of FGM/C. It does this by connecting, collaborating and supporting Asian actors and survivors to advocate for an end to this harmful practice.

Introduction

There are no official data on the practice of female genital cutting (FGC) in the Philippines. Informal surveys conducted by international non-governmental organisations and academics suggest that the prevalence of FGC in the Philippines is 80–86% of girls and women in Muslim communities in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindana (BARMM).

A Note on Data

A National Demographic and Health Programme survey (*DHS*) was carried out in the Philippines in 2022, but it did not include any questions related to FGC. There have not been any other national surveys that include references to the practice. This Short Report, therefore, is primarily based on a 2020 survey conducted in the five provinces making up the Bangsamoro region by CARE Philippines in conjunction with two of the Philippines' civil-society organisations, Leading Individuals to Flourish and Thrive (*LIFT*) and Women for Justice in the Bangsamoro.¹ The sample was 413 women and 45 men. The women included several (an unspecified number) *panday* (traditional birth attendants), and the men included several (an unspecified number) religious leaders. Among the participants were representatives of all five provinces.²

For this Short Report, reference was also made to various academic publications:

- *Female Circumcision Among Yakan in Basilan* by S. A. Calsalin (April 2008);³
- *Muslim women and circumcision – A Study of Intergenerational Practice and its Continuity in Southern Philippines* by O. C. V. Belisario (2009), which focused on Muslim women in Zamboanga City, Southern Mindanao;⁴ and
- two surveys conducted by Salmah Lao Manalocon Basher in 2016: *The Stages of Female Circumcision Practice among Meranaos Living in the Rural and Marginalized Areas in Lanao* and *Women Who Study in Madrasah School Experienced Higher Number of Female Circumcision Compared to Western or English Schools*.⁵

It should be noted that all these surveys were of small numbers of people. The study by Belisario involved eight pairs of mothers and daughters, one *panday* and one imam (a total of 18 participants, all residing in various parts of Zamboanga City).⁶ Calsalin's study took place among the Yakan people in Basilan and involved three *panday*, five religious leaders and an unspecified number of girls, women and men.⁷ Basher's research involved 30 *Manunuris* (traditional practitioners who carry out FGC) and 30 religious leaders.⁸ Her research comparing FGC prevalence among Meranaos women who attended Madrasah schools and those who attended Western or English schools involved 30 women aged 15 and over who were resident in Lanao del Sur and had experienced FGC.⁹

A Note on Terminology

The terms used in the Philippines to describe FGC differ between the affected communities living in the BARMM. *Pag sunnat* or *pag-Islam* are the terms most commonly used by the Moro and the Yakan. *Turi* is the term used by the Meranaos, who live mainly in Lanao del Sur.¹⁰ 'Female genital cutting' and 'female circumcision' are also used by these groups, rather than 'female genital mutilation', as they do not regard the practice to be 'mutilation'. 'FGC' is therefore used in this Short Report, except where the vernacular is applied in relation to a specific local context.

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Key Findings and Indicators



Prevalence: In the Philippines, informal surveys suggest that the prevalence of FGC is 80–86% of girls and women in Muslim communities in the BARMM



Terminology: Terms vary, but *pag sunnat* or *pag-Islam* are most commonly used by the Moro and the Yakan; *turi* by the Meranaos in Lanao del Sur



Age: A girl may be cut from infancy (if her parents request it) to the age of eight



Type: The most-commonly practised form appears to be Type 4, although Type 1 is also practised in some areas



Agent: Cutting is largely carried out by traditional practitioners



Attitudes: Women make the decisions about FGC, supported by imams. The main drivers are religious beliefs and the idea that FGC makes one ritually clean



HDI Rank: 113 out of 193 countries ('High')¹¹



SDG Gender Index Rating: 61 out of 144 countries in 2022 (score of 69.8)¹²



Population: 116,860,354 (as at 10 July 2024) with a 1.58% growth rate (2024 est.)¹³



Infant Mortality Rate: 22 deaths per 1,000 live births (2024 est.)¹⁴



Maternal Mortality Ratio: 78 deaths per 100,000 live births (2020 est.)¹⁵



Literacy: 96.3% of the total population aged 15 and over can read/write (2019)¹⁶

Prevalence of FGC

There are no official data to indicate the prevalence of FGC in the Philippines. The practice appears mostly to be limited to some Muslim communities in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), which comprises approximately 4.5 million people, or 4.04% of the Philippines' population.¹⁷ This includes the Moros, Yakan and Meranaos Muslim communities.

*Informal surveys conducted by international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and academics suggest that **the prevalence of FGC in the Philippines is 80–86% of girls and women in these communities.***

- In 2020 LIFT, CARE Philippines and Women for Justice carried out a survey across the BARMM region, which included 413 women and girls. Four out of five of them have undergone FGC.¹⁸
- An academic study among Meranaos women living in the Lanao del Sur province of the BARMM suggests a prevalence of 86%.¹⁹

Geography

Bangsamoro (BARMM) includes an administrative region in the south-west of the Philippines and a group of adjacent islands. It comprises five provinces: Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. The regional centre is the city of Cotabato in Maguindanao (see Figure 1 below).

FGC is known to take place across the BARMM region, which has been declared an autonomous region with its own laws. The Philippines' Muslim population is concentrated (91%) in that region. However, small numbers of Muslims also reside in other parts of the country, in particular the southern Zamboanga Peninsula and SOCCSKSARGEN²⁰ regions. Belisario's survey was conducted in the former, but it can be assumed that FGC does take place in all regions that neighbour the BARMM provinces and is therefore more widespread than has been recorded to date.

The LIFT/CARE/Women for Justice survey confirms that the practice of FGC is widespread in all five provinces of Bangsamoro, although there are a few places where local leaders have succeeded in replacing FGC with non-harmful rituals.²¹



Figure 1: Map of the Philippines

Belisario's survey confirms that it takes place in the Zamboanga Peninsula, where 18.22% of households are Muslim.²²

Calsalin's survey was undertaken in Basilan, where 89.2% of the population is Muslim.²³

Basher's surveys were in Lanao del Sur, where 94.74% of the population is Muslim.²⁴

It must be noted, however, that FGC does not occur in all Muslim communities: to date, its practice has only been reported among the Yakan, Moros and Meranaos, among whom the aforementioned surveys were conducted.

An official national survey is needed to establish the full extent of the practice.

Age of Cutting

According to the LIFT/CARE/Women for Justice survey, the mean age that girls undergo FGC is five years. However, the survey found that in the Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi area, FGC may take place while girls are still in infancy, if their parents request it.²⁵

In other areas it may not occur until pre-pubescence, as it is assumed girls are ready for marriage when they have been cut.²⁶

Calsalin refers to the 'right time' for undergoing FGC as varying from five to eight years.²⁷

However, an adult woman who has not undergone FGC and wants to marry a Bangsamoro man is expected to be cut.²⁸

*The LIFT/CARE/Women for Justice survey found that the 'prevailing criteria for being subjected to [FGC] is when the girl is mature enough to remember the name of the traditional birth attendant who performed the practice.'*²⁹

This is supported by Belisario, who writes that it takes place

between a few days old to eight years old, which is a year before the age of reason. It is because at this age, children are less likely to experience embarrassment during circumcision as the procedure requires them to expose their genitals to another person.³⁰

Basher found that, among the Meranao, FGC is performed in three stages: firstly during childhood, preferably before ten years of age; secondly 'once the girl turned to be a woman and still in the early marriage of her life'; and thirdly during late adulthood, which is defined as 50 years or above. This third stage symbolises the removal of 'sins that the woman had committed for the past years of her life.'³¹

Generally, the practice is accompanied by rituals that may include incantations and prayers and involve various materials such as candles, eggs and water, all of which are believed to cleanse the girl and make her attractive to the opposite sex. The nature of these rituals may vary from place to place within the BARMM, but the intention is to show the community that a girl is ready for marriage.³²

The median age for a first marriage in the BARMM is 21 years, the youngest in the Philippines.³³ Under the 1977 Presidential Decree No. 1083 for the codification of Muslim Personal Laws, girls aged 12 to 15 are eligible to be married as soon as they reach puberty and upon petition by the girl's parent or guardian to the Sharia District Court.³⁴ Performance of FGC is closely related to early marriage 'as it is culturally assumed that girls are ready for marriage after undergoing [FGC].'³⁵

Type of Cutting

The most common form of FGC practised among the Moro and Yakan is Type 4 (see the box below), described by Calsalin as ‘scraping of the labia majora without any bleeding.’³⁶

The LIFT/CARE/Women for Justice report notes that methods may vary in the BARMM:

Depending on the province and ethnolinguistic group, [FGC] may include bamboo strips, razor blades, nail cutters, or knives as main tools. . . . The clitoris and the labia are the common parts involved. Scraping and pricking cause bleeding (‘just a little blood’) to some.³⁷

Belisario describes the practice in Zamboanga City as ‘non-invasive and devoid of any form of mutilation.’³⁸

Basher found that Type 1 is the most practised form of FGC among the Meranao (by 73.3% of cutters): ‘a needle is used to prick the clitoris and subsequently, removing a small portion of the clitoral tissue’ which ‘lasts for approximately five minutes’. The remainder of cutters practice Type 4, which involves ‘simple pricking of the clitoris and making it bleed’; this lasts roughly three minutes.³⁹

Female genital cutting is classified into four major types by the World Health Organization:

Type 1: This is the partial or total removal of the clitoral glans (the external and visible part of the clitoris, which is a sensitive part of the female genitals), and/or the prepuce/clitoral hood (the fold of skin surrounding the clitoral glans).

Type 2: This is the partial or total removal of the clitoral glans and the labia minora (the inner folds of the vulva), with or without removal of the labia majora (the outer folds of skin of the vulva).

Type 3: Also known as infibulation, this is the narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the labia minora, or labia majora, sometimes through stitching, with or without removal of the clitoral prepuce/clitoral hood and glans.

Type 4: This includes all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, e.g., pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing the genital area.⁴⁰

Practitioners

*FGC is usually carried out among the Moros and Yakan by traditional practitioners known as panday.*⁴¹

The panday are also traditional birth attendants, often belonging to a family of pandays who have carried out FGC, along with care in pregnancy and birthing, for several generations, passing on skills and knowledge to each other.⁴²

Meranao women are cut by traditional practitioners called Manunuris.

FGC is often conducted as part of a ritual, which may vary by location and Muslim community, but generally involves bathing the girl, or at least washing her clitoris, before cutting. The ritual may include lighting candles, pouring water over the girl's head and reciting prayers 'to calm and free the child from being nervous'.⁴³ Sometimes it is preceded or followed by ear-piercing.⁴⁴

*Questions have been raised about the hygiene of the tools used for cutting and the resulting risk of inflammation and infection.*⁴⁵

Attitudes

All the surveys indicate that the decision for girls to undergo FGC is made by senior women in the family together with the pandays and manunuris, and that women's 'strong adherence to religion and social conformity were the factors that largely influenced their perceptions of female circumcision, making the practice highly symbolic and ritualistic.'⁴⁶

While men in the family have little influence on the decision, they usually condone the practice because of the need for the family to be accepted socially.⁴⁷ The community's male religious leaders underpin the women's decisions – in particular, those who believe FGC is obligatory for all Muslim women.

Drivers of FGC

Muslims comprise the second-largest religious group in the Philippines, at 6.4%.⁴⁸

90.9% of households in the BARMM are Muslim. Muslims are also present in Zamboanga Peninsula (18.2% of households), the SOCCSKSARGEN region (15.8%), south-western Tagalog (3.5%), Northern Mindanao (8.45%) and the Davao region (3.5%). Muslim households make up fewer than 2% of households in all other regions of the country, where Roman Catholicism is the major religion.⁴⁹

Religion is cited as the main reason for undertaking FGC by participants in all the surveys examined for this Short Report. Communities widely believe it to be an Islamic practice,⁵⁰ a pre-condition to becoming a Muslim⁵¹ and a 'symbolic act of deep devotion to Islamic teachings'.⁵²

However, among the Muslim religious leaders who participated in the LIFT/CARE/Women for Justice survey there was debate, as some say it is not Islamic.⁵³

Calsalin's survey also includes religious leaders, all of whom believe FGC should be continued, but the person performing the procedure should not over-cut or cause bleeding.⁵⁴

According to Basher's respondents, a woman who has not undergone FGC is 'considered useless in the eyes of God and men' and that any services or tasks undertaken by her are prohibited or *haram*, to the extent that 'even the seat which had been occupied by a non-circumcised woman should not be occupied by any Muslim individual because it is haram'.⁵⁵

*This belief that FGC is a religious requirement is closely linked to cultural identity within the specific Muslim communities in the BARMM. It symbolises the shared heritage of a particular ethnic group, with all the social privileges and benefits attached to that, which makes women reluctant to break with the practice.*⁵⁶

This cultural identity includes other practices, notably child/early/sometimes forced marriage, as FGC is a way of showing that a girl is believed to be ready and fit for marriage. This means that young girls are often deprived of educational opportunities and exposed to reproductive-health risks and harms.⁵⁷

Calsalin found that the girls who were expecting to undergo FGC all supported it, saying it would 'mark their passage into adulthood', it would mean they were 'considered ready for marriage', and that the 'community shuns those who refuse the procedure'. Women who had already undergone FGC made statements such as, '[A]n uncircumcised person, no matter how old she might be, will generally be regarded as a child, without wisdom, will be seen as inferior to others and not being blessed.' All of the women in the survey were in favour of the practice continuing.⁵⁸

Among Basher's respondents, more girls who had attended Madrasah School had undergone FGC (93.3%) than those who had attended Western or English schools (6.6%).⁵⁹

*Another reason given by women for the continuation of FGC is cleanliness – that the ritual accompanying FGC means 'you are like shedding your skin and reborn.' Girls also regard it as a cleansing rite.*⁶⁰

One of the leaders surveyed in the LIFT/CARE/Women for Justice study said, 'The pag-sunnat is purification or cleanliness. A Muslim cannot do her religious obligations like praying and reading the Qu'ran if she is not clean.'⁶¹

Legislation

There is no law against FGC in the Philippines.

In 2006 all state parties were asked to submit answers to a series of questions posed by the *United Nations Study on Violence Against Children*, and the Government responded as follows:

- 8. Provide information on the way in which harmful or violent traditional practices, including but not limited to female genital mutilation, child marriage or honour crimes[,] are addressed in your country.**

Answer

The Revised Penal Code (Art. 262)⁶² penalizes intentional mutilation of another by depriving him, either totally or partially, of some essential organ for reproduction and any other intentional mutilation.

Marriage between persons where one party is, or both parties are[,] below 18 is a void marriage.⁶³

It seems, however, that no cases of FGC have been brought to court under Article 262 or any other national law.

As FGC is closely related to a girl's readiness for marriage,⁶⁴ it is interesting to note in the above response by the Government that marriage below the age of 18 is regarded as void when, under the 1977 Presidential Decree No. 1083 codifying Muslim personal laws and providing for administration, girls aged 12 to 15 are eligible to be married as soon as they reach puberty and upon the girl's parent or guardian petitioning the Sharia District Court:

Article 16. Capacity to contract marriage.

(1) Any Muslim male at least fifteen years of age and any Muslim female of the age of puberty or upwards and not suffering from any impediment under the provisions of this Code may contract marriage. A female is presumed to have attained puberty upon reaching the age of fifteen.

(2) However, the Shari'a District Court may, upon petition of a proper wali, order the solemnization of the marriage of a female who though less than fifteen but not below twelve years of age, has attained puberty. . .⁶⁵

The Republic of The Philippines is signed up to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and in 2021 submitted its 9th *Periodic Review Report*. This contained no reference to either FGC nor child marriage. Subsequently, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) requested further information on the Government's approach to child marriage, but did not refer to FGC:

Gender stereotypes and harmful practices

8. Please provide information on the following:

[. . .]

(c) The number of reported cases, prosecutions and convictions, and the sentences imposed on the perpetrators, of harmful practices against women and girls, in particular child marriage, disaggregated by region and age of the victim . . .⁶⁶

At the 86th session of the CEDAW, at which the Philippines' Government responded to this and other issues raised by CEDAW members, the State delegation reported:

There were still no programmes or legal actions taken to address early and forced marriage in the Muslim communities, but a range of programmes were conducted in other communities that reached 23,000 people. Further, the State conducted public awareness campaigns on gender perspectives in Islamic law.⁶⁷

On the same occasion, CEDAW members also questioned:

- 'Was data systematically being collected on all occurrences of harmful practices in the State party, including on child and forced marriage?'; and
- 'What programmes targeting girls, women, parents, community, traditional and religious leaders, as well as law enforcement and the judiciary, were in place to raise awareness of the criminal nature and negative consequences of child marriage on girls' education and human rights?'

The State replied, 'Since the passage of law against child marriage in 2021, the State had disseminated its provisions with the support of the Philippine Commission on Women.'⁶⁸

However, in 2024 a Special Rapporteur for the UN Human Rights Council visited The Philippines to report on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children.⁶⁹ In the summary report, the difficulties of implementing that 2021 Act in the BARMM were noted:

48. However, sharia courts have jurisdiction over the Muslim-majority Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and other parts of Mindanao, and the Code of Muslim Personal Laws still sets a lower age for marriage, namely 15 for males and 12 for females who have attained puberty. The courts in the rest of the country remain under the supervision of the Supreme Court of the Philippines.

49. The Special Rapporteur notes that the mixed legal system of the Philippines, which consists of civil law, Indigenous law and sharia or Islamic law, including the Code of Muslim Personal Laws, results in a conflict with regard to the definition of the child in family and religious matters.

50. During meetings with interlocutors, the Special Rapporteur learned that a national consultation with stakeholders had been conducted before the enactment of the Act Prohibiting the Practice of Child Marriage and Imposing Penalties for Violations Thereof, and an attempt had been made to reconcile and eliminate disparities among the different legal systems, but those efforts had proved to be futile, which had posed a challenge for the implementation of the Act across the country.⁷⁰

The SDG Gender Index

*The Philippines' overall performance moving toward achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is scored at 67.47, ranking it 92nd out of 166 countries.*⁷¹

However, it is falling behind with regard to Goal 5 (gender equality), rating as 'Significant challenges remain; Score stagnating or increasing at less than 50% of required rate'. There has been a fall in the rate of progress from a score of 54.7 in 2015 to 50.7 in 2020.⁷² No rating is available specifically for Target 5.3 (*Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation*).⁷³

*In terms of the Gender Index, the Philippines ranks 61st out of 144 countries globally and 10th out of 26 countries in the Asia region.*⁷⁴

Cross-Border FGC

There is no evidence to suggest that girls are taken out of the Philippines to undergo FGC in other countries, as currently there is no law against it being performed in the Philippines.

It is not known whether girls are brought into the Philippines from countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia, where the practice has been criminalised.

Medicalised FGC

Whether or not more girls are being cut by health professionals is unknown.

In her survey, Belisario points out that,

in the case of the Muslim women in Southern Mindanao, the chances of a woman being circumcised by a woman doctor is slim yet possible if and when the female doctor or any female medical practitioner has also been taught the prayers and incantations required in the exercise of pag-sunnat.⁷⁵

This demonstrates the idea that the ritual accompanying FGC is as important as the actual act of FGC.

Local health and social-welfare workers were included in the LIFT/CARE/Women for Justice survey, and they noted the risk of possible infection and trauma from FGC. One commented, 'I can't see any benefit from it[;] actually it brings harm. For example, if the materials used were unsterile, it is dangerous to health. The practice should really stop.'⁷⁶ There was no indication in the survey as to whether these workers had ever undertaken FGC on a girl.

Trends and Challenges to Ending FGC

Clearly, the first priority should be to undertake a national study to better understand the extent and drivers of FGC practice in the Philippines.

Data is also needed on the health consequences for women and girls who have undergone the relevant types of FGC. For example, Calsalin makes the point that FGC-related trauma, such as clitoris laceration, vulvar inflammation, vulvar infection and tetanus account for 1% of all visits every year to Lamitan Emergency Hospital.⁷⁷

The close relationship between the continuance of FGC and child marriage needs to be recognised by the Government, and efforts must be made to ensure there is a widespread awareness of dangers to the health and educations of girls who are married at very young ages.

Participants from the Philippines who attended the Asia Network to End FGM's workshop in March 2020 were among those who reported feeling unsafe when actively working to eliminate FGC, given that the current Government is 'dangerously hostile toward human rights [activism], which has created a climate where working on women's and human rights is not safe.'⁷⁸

Raising awareness of the harms that FGC can cause, using dialogue and storytelling techniques, may be a more appropriate way to tackle the problem from a social-norms perspective.

*Basher makes the point that, as religion and culture are the main reasons for the continuation of FGC, the way forward should be engaging with teachers, religious leaders and health workers, and having **education** be 'the starting point towards the elimination of the practice.'*⁷⁹

An example of how change can be brought about is that of a municipality (Datu Saudi Ampatuan) in Maguindanao, which has introduced measures to stop the practice of FGC in its communities, including imposing fines on practitioners. As one 70-year-old panday from that municipality told a CARE interviewer, 'I am no longer doing it because I am too old. My vision is blurred and I might poke something else. The use of needle is being forbidden. If someone is caught doing it, there is a fine.'⁸⁰

The CARE/LIFT/Women for Justice report ends on a note of hope: '[T]he example of changing attitudes in Maguindanao shows that if a critical mass of Bangsamoro people reject the practice, it will no longer be regarded as a requirement among Moro women and girls.'⁸¹

Working to End FGC



Website: www.care-philippines.org/

CARE has been providing emergency relief and development assistance in the Philippines since 1949. Over the years, the organisation has developed strong working relationships with local communities and non-governmental organisations throughout the country.

In the Philippines, CARE incorporates gender- and gender-based violence programming in its humanitarian response and development work; pilots exploratory action research in a range of topics such as feminist open government, women's economic empowerment, female genital mutilation/cutting, gender-sensitive cash-voucher assistance, and women's leadership in emergencies; and participates actively in national clusters and inter-agency task forces in relation to gender-based violence.

CARE works and partners with local civil-society and women's-rights organisations to ensure that women from the most marginalised and vulnerable communities are genuinely consulted, are empowered to speak, and are heard.



Website: [Asia and The Pacific – Equality Now](http://AsiaandThePacific-EqualityNow.org)

Equality Now is an international NGO campaigning for legal and systemic change to address violence and discrimination against women and girls around the world. It is a feminist organisation using the law to protect and promote the human rights of all women and girls by challenging and seeking reform of laws to establish enduring equality for women and girls everywhere.

Founded in 1992, Equality Now has an international network of lawyers, activists, and supporters that has held governments responsible for ending legal inequality, sexual exploitation, sexual violence and harmful practices. It is a resource centre with toolkits and guidelines, fact sheets and reports about FGC.



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The Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (*ARROW*) is a non-profit women's non-governmental organisation (*NGO*) with a consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and an observer status with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, *ARROW* has been working since 1993 to champion women and young people's sexual and reproductive rights in partnership with women's-rights organisations, youth-led and youth-serving organisations, and *NGOs* working on gender equality and sexual and reproductive rights.

ARROW occupies a strategic niche in the Asia-Pacific region and is a Global-South-based, feminist and women-led organisation that focuses on the equality, gender, health and human rights of women.

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- 17 Republic of the Philippines, Philippine Statistics Authority (2020) *Highlights of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) Population 2020 Census of Population and Housing (2020 CPH)*. 2021-330. Available at <https://psa.gov.ph/content/highlights-bangsamoro-autonomous-region-muslim-mindanao-barmm-population-2020-census>.
- 18 CARE/LIFT/Women for Justice (2021), p.13.
- 19 Basher (2016a), *op. cit.*, p.69.

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- 20 ***SOCCKSARGEN is an acronym that stands for a region encompassing four provinces and one city in south-central Mindanao: South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat and Sarangani, and General Santos City.***
- 21 CARE/LIFT/Women for Justice (2021), p.4.
- 22 Republic of the Philippines, Philippine Statistics Authority (2020) *Religious Affiliation in the Philippines (2020 Census of Population and Housing)*. 2023-70. Available at <https://psa.gov.ph/content/religious-affiliation-philippines-2020-census-population-and-housing>.
- 23 Calsalin (2008), *op. cit.*
- 24 - Basher (2016a), *op. cit.*
- Basher (2016b), *op. cit.*
- 25 CARE/LIFT/Women for Justice (2021), p.13.
- 26 CARE/LIFT/Women for Justice (2021), p.4.
- 27 Calsalin (2008), *op. cit.*, p.22.
- 28 CARE/LIFT/Women for Justice (2021), p.11.
- 29 CARE/LIFT/Women for Justice (2021), p.13.
- 30 Belisario (2009), *op. cit.*, p.7.
- 31 Basher (2016b), *op. cit.*, pp. 69 & 73.
- 32 CARE/LIFT/Women for Justice (2021), p.12.
- 33 Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) and ICF (2023) *2022 Philippine National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS): Final Report*, p.67. Quezon City, Philippines, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: PSA and ICF. Available at <https://psa.gov.ph/content/2022-philippine-national-demographic-and-health-survey-ndhs-final-report>.
- 34 ***Presidential Decree No. 1083, Article 16, paragraphs 1–2: ‘Capacity to contract marriage. — (1) Any Muslim male at least fifteen years of age and any Muslim female of the age of puberty or upwards and not suffering from any impediment under the provisions of this Code may contract marriage. A female is presumed to have attained puberty upon reaching the age of fifteen. (2) However, the Shari’a District Court may, upon petition of a proper wali, order the solemnization of the marriage of a female who though less than fifteen but not below twelve years of age, has attained puberty.’***
Presidential Decree No. 1083: A Decree to Ordain and Promulgate a Code Recognizing the System of Filipino Muslim Laws, Codifying Muslim Personal Laws, and Providing for its Administration and For Other Purposes (1977) Available at https://lawphil.net/statutes/presdecs/pd1977/pd_1083_1977.html.
- 35 CARE/LIFT/Women for Justice (2021), p.4.
- 36 Calsalin (2008), *op. cit.*, p.28.
- 37 CARE/LIFT/Women for Justice (2021), p.15.
- 38 Belisario (2009), *op. cit.*, p.7.
- 39 Basher (2016b), *op. cit.*, pp.17–18.
- 40 World Health Organization (2024) *Female genital mutilation*, 5 February. Factsheet. Available at <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation>.
- 41 Calsalin (2008), *op. cit.*, pp.16–18.
- 42 Calsalin (2008), *op. cit.*, pp.16–18.
- 43 Calsalin (2008), *op. cit.*, p.16.
- 44 CARE/LIFT/Women for Justice (2021), p.13.
- 45 CARE/LIFT/Women for Justice (2021), p.16.
- 46 Belisario (2009), *op. cit.*, p.1.
- 47 CARE/LIFT/Women for Justice (2021), p.15.

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- 48 Republic of the Philippines, Philippine Statistics Authority (2020) *Religious Affiliation in the Philippines (2020 Census of Population and Housing)*. 2023-70. Available at <https://psa.gov.ph/content/religious-affiliation-philippines-2020-census-population-and-housing>.
- 49 Republic of the Philippines, Philippine Statistics Authority (2020), *op. cit.*
- 50 CARE/LIFT/Women for Justice (2021), p.4.
- 51 Calsalin (2008), *op. cit.*, p.7.
- 52 Belisario (2009), *op. cit.*, p.4.
- 53 CARE/LIFT/Women for Justice (2021), p.13.
- 54 Calsalin (2008), *op. cit.*, p.20.
- 55 Basher (2016a), *op. cit.*, p.72.
- 56 Belisario (2009), *op. cit.*, p.4.
- 57 CARE/LIFT/Women for Justice (2021), p.12.
- 58 Calsalin (2008), *op. cit.*, pp.21–22.
- 59 Basher (2016b), *op. cit.*, p.17.
- 60 Calsalin (2008), *op. cit.*, p.22.
- 61 CARE/LIFT/Women for Justice (2021), p.11.
- 62 **Revised Penal Code Article 262 is available at <https://attorney.org.ph/legal-news/290-physical-injuries-elements-and-penalties#:~:text=Art.%20262.%20Mutilation.%20%E2%80%94%20The%20penalty%20of%20reclusion,prison%20mayor%20in%20its%20medium%20and%20maximum%20periods>.**
- 63 United Nations Secretary-General’s Study on Violence Against Children (undated) *Response to the questionnaire received from the Government of the Philippines*, p.23. Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/CRC/StudyViolenceChildren/Responses/Philippines.pdf>.
- 64 CARE/LIFT/Women for Justice (2021), p.4.
- 65 *Presidential Decree No. 1083: A Decree to Ordain and Promulgate a Code Recognizing the System of Filipino Muslim Laws, Codifying Muslim Personal Laws, and Providing for its Administration and For Other Purposes* (1977) Available at https://lawphil.net/statutes/presdecs/pd1977/pd_1083_1977.html.
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- 81 CARE/LIFT/Women for Justice (2021), p.17.