

Sierra Leone



83.0%¹

Key Findings

The prevalence of FGM in women aged 15–49 is 83.0%.

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

42.5% of women aged 15-49 believe that FGM is required by their religion, and 57.0% of women in the same age-range believe that the practice should continue.²

Geography:

The district with the highest FGM prevalence is Karene, in the north (98% of women aged 15-49). The district with the lowest prevalence is Bo, in the central province (65.0%).³

Age:

45.0% of women aged 15–49 who have undergone FGM were cut between the ages of 10 and 14⁴

Type:

'Cut, flesh removed' is the most common type of FGM practised⁵

Agent:

Almost all instances of FGM are performed by traditional cutters⁶

Development Indicators

HDI Rank: 182 out of 189 countries (2020)⁷

SDG Gender Index Rating: 120 out of 129 countries (2019)⁸

Population: 8,154,439 (as of 21 June 2021), with a 2.21% growth rate (2021 est.)⁹

Infant Mortality Rate: 31 deaths per 1,000 live births (2019)¹⁰

Maternal Mortality Ratio: 1,120 deaths per 100,000 live births (2017)¹¹

Literacy: 43.2% of the total population aged 15 and over can read/write¹²

*'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 Leone¹³*

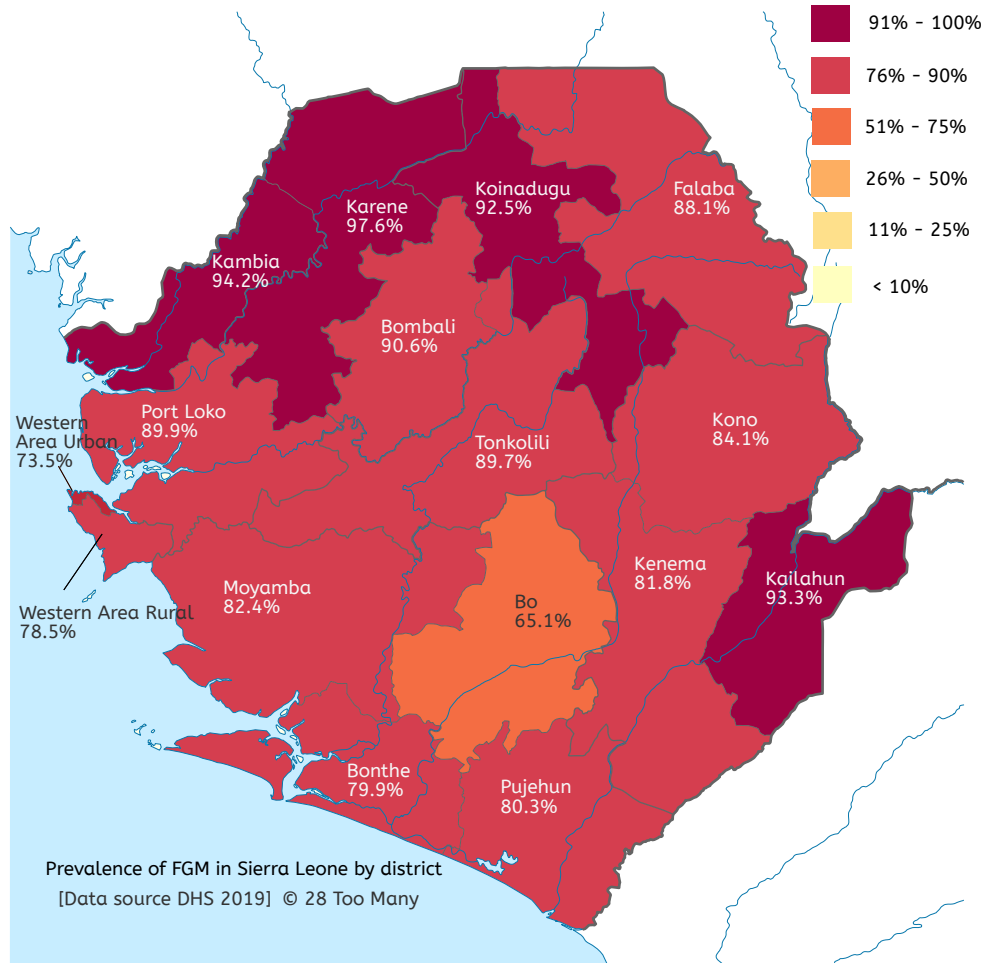
Prevalence

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 Karene, in the north (98% of women aged 15-49). The district with the lowest prevalence is Bo, in the central province (65.0%). FGM is more prevalent among women living in rural areas (88.7%) than among those living in urban areas (76.4%).

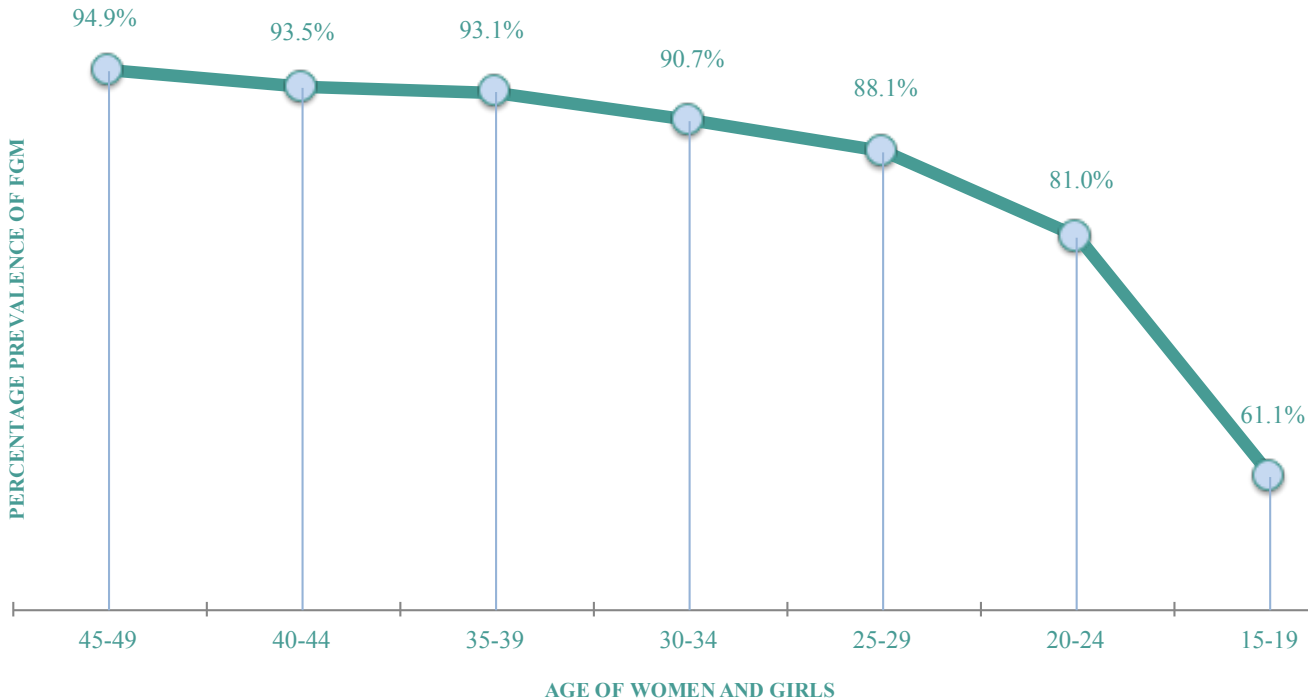
Prevalence is inversely correlated with a woman's level of education, but is relatively unaffected by the wealth quintile in which a woman falls, unless she is in the highest wealth quintile, in which prevalence drops from 90% or more to 76.9% for women aged 15-49.

42.5% of women aged 15-49 believe that FGM is required by their religion, and 57.0% of women in the same age-range believe that the practice should continue.¹⁴



Between 2013 and 2019, the overall prevalence for women aged 15-49 fell from 89.6% to 83.0%. 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 94.9%, while for the youngest age group this has fallen to 61.1%. 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.¹⁵

FGM PREVALENCE BY AGE IN SIERRA LEONE



SOURCE: DHS 2019 | GRAPHIC © 28 TOO MANY

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.¹⁶

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- 1 ('DHS 2019') Statistics Sierra Leone (Stats SL) and ICF. 2020. Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2019. Freetown, Sierra Leone, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: Stats SL and ICF. Available at: <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR365/FR365.pdf>
 - 2 DHS 2019, p. 341.
 - 3 DHS 2019, p.335.
 - 4 ('DHS 2013') Statistics Sierra Leone - SSL and ICF International. 2014. Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2013. Freetown, Sierra Leone: SSL and ICF International. Available at: <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR297/FR297.pdf>
 - 5 DHS 2013, 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 (2020) *Human Development Reports*. Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/SLE>
 - 8 Equal Measures 2030 (2019) *Harnessing the Power of Data for Gender Equality: Introducing the 2019 EM2030 SDG Gender Index*, pp.12–13. Available at www.data.em2030.org/2019-global-report (accessed 12 June 2019).
 - 9 Country Meters (2021) *Sierra Leone*, 21 June 2021. Available at http://countrymeters.info/en/Sierra_Leone (accessed 21 June 2021).
 - 10 Countdown to 2030. Countdown Country Profile: Sierra Leone. Available at: <https://profiles.countdown2030.org/#/ds/SLE> (accessed 21 June 2021)
 - 11 Countdown to 2030, *op. cit.*
 - 12 United Nations Development Programme, *op. cit.*
 - 13 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).
 - 14 DHS 2019, p. 341
 - 15 - DHS 2019, p. 335
- DHS 2013, p.301.
 - 16 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 (updated January 2020) *Sierra Leone: Statistical Profile on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting*. Available at https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/country_profiles/Sierra%20Leone/FGM_Country_Profiles_March2020/FGM_SLE.pdf (accessed 21 June 2021)

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.