



# Evaluating the Impact of a Sensitisation Workshop on Religious Leaders' Knowledge and Attitudes Towards Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Somaliland: A Research Protocol

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## Abstract

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) remains highly prevalent in Somaliland, sustained by deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and perceived religious justifications. Religious leaders are influential custodians of these norms, but their specific knowledge of FGM/C types and health consequences is often limited. Targeted engagement with these leaders is a strategic but insufficiently evaluated approach to shifting community attitudes. This protocol describes a study to evaluate the impact of a structured sensitisation workshop on Islamic religious leaders' knowledge and attitudes towards FGM/C in Somaliland. The primary objective is to measure changes in knowledge regarding FGM/C typology, health complications, and relevant Islamic rulings. The secondary objective is to assess shifts in attitudes concerning the continuation of the practice. A pre-test/post-test intervention study will be conducted. A purposive sample of 60 Islamic religious leaders (Imams and Khateeb) from selected urban and rural districts will be recruited. Participants will complete a validated questionnaire immediately before and after a two-day, culturally tailored sensitisation workshop. The workshop content covers medical facts, Islamic jurisprudence, and alternative rites of passage. Quantitative data will be analysed using paired t-tests; qualitative data from focus group discussions will be analysed thematically. As this is a study protocol, no empirical findings are presented. The study is designed to detect a hypothesised minimum increase of 30% in knowledge scores and a thematic shift in attitudes from acceptance towards advocacy for abandonment. The study will provide evidence on the potential of religious leader engagement as a component of FGM/C abandonment programmes in

Somaliland. It will conclude on the effectiveness of the workshop model for changing influential community perspectives. Based on the outcomes, recommendations will be formulated regarding the potential integration or scale-up of this workshop model within faith-based and public health programming aimed at FGM/C abandonment. female genital mutilation, cutting, FGM/C, religious leaders, sensitisation, workshop, knowledge, attitudes, Somaliland, intervention study. This protocol outlines a structured evaluation of an under-researched intervention, aiming to generate evidence on engaging religious leaders to address the socio-religious dimensions of FGM/C in a high-prevalence setting.

**Keywords:** *Female genital mutilation/cutting, Somaliland, Religious leaders, Health education, Attitude change, Sub-Saharan Africa*

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