

Social approaches to ending female genital mutilation

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The potential of a method of replacing female genital mutilation as an initiation into womanhood with culturally sensitive alternatives is to be explored.

The University of Leicester is hosting a workshop on 'Alternative Rites of Passage: Their role in anti-FGM work in Africa' on 9 March. Organised by the Institute for Advanced Studies, the workshop coincides with the University's week-long celebration of International Women's Day.

Alternative rites of passage, or ARP, is touted by NGOs and international donors as an alternative to female initiation into womanhood but without [female genital mutilation](#)/cutting. In these ceremonies and the instruction that usually precedes them, girls' human rights (mainly to life, health, education, protection) and cultural rights (manifested in teachings and ritual elements that aim to mimic the cultural traditions of the community concerned) are intertwined in one social space. ARP is one element of longer-term strategies that can include community education and sensitisation, awareness-raising, the empowerment of girls and women, and law enforcement.

Alternative rites of passage are already combatting FGM in some parts of Kenya. However, there is currently very little understanding of a number of aspects of delivery, or the longer term implications. For example, do ARPs just delay FGM/FGC until later in someone's lives? How do those who previously made money from carrying out FGM/FGC

(often female elders) now supplement their income?

The workshop will bring representatives from Egerton and Kenyatta Universities, and from AMREF, a large iNGO working on FGM in Kenya to consider some of these questions. The workshop aims to:

- Increase awareness of ARP as a response to FGM/FGC in communities both in the UK and in Kenya
- Increase the evidence about ARP and successful, sustainable delivery
- Lay the foundations for a co-created evidence base to inform national and international policy and practice

Organiser Dr. Diane Levine, Institute Manager and Fellow in the Leicester Institute for Advanced Studies, said: "Alternative rites of passage are a currently underexplored area. We want to build future collaboration around this topic, using Leicester's equitable, respectful approach to global partnership building. As a result of the research we co-produce, women and girls will be safer to lead happier, healthier lives.

"Leicester and Kenyatta are both HeforShe Impact Champion universities, and as part of that role we are working with our global partners to develop understanding of gender, society and justice through a range of projects."

Dr. Lisa Smith, Director of the Leicester Institute for Advanced Studies, said: "The Leicester Institute for Advanced Studies provides a range of opportunities to bring together people from across disciplines and practice to address complex societal issues such as these that could not be solved by a single discipline alone. FGM/FGC is an excellent example of the kind of global challenge that requires collaboration across the social and life sciences and humanities working in partnership with NGOs."

Provided by University of Leicester

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