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PRESS RELEASE

Female Genital Mutilation in Iraq

Study shows: FGM common in Kirkuk

For the first time, an empirical study proved that female genital mutilation is also prevalent in parts of Iraq beyond the borders of the Kurdish Region.

WADI and the local women's rights organization PANA have conducted an in-depth research about the existence and background of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Kirkuk. They interviewed 1212 women above the age of 14 and asked each of them 61 questions.

Two years ago, WADI did a similar researchⁱ in Kurdish Northern Iraq which revealed an alarmingly high prevalence rate of more than 72%. Around the same time, Human Rights Watch published a qualitative studyⁱⁱ which backs and complements WADI's results. Meanwhile, after extensive protests and lobby efforts from activists and women's rights groups (see notably the campaign STOP FGM in Kurdistanⁱⁱⁱ), the Regional Government has adopted a legal ban of FGM and other forms of violence against women and children.

Not so in Southern and Central Iraq, which also comprises the multi-ethnic, oil-rich city of Kirkuk. The public authorities assume that FGM is non-existent outside the Kurdish Region.

The new Kirkuk study proves this assumption to be utterly false. According to its findings, **38.2% of Kirkuki women live with the consequences of FGM.**

With 65.4%, Kurdish women are the most affected ethnic group. Arab women hold 25.7% and Turkmen women 12.3%.

Focusing on the religious affiliations, 40.9% of the Sunnis, 23.4% of the Shi'ites and 42.9% of the Kaka'is are genitally mutilated.

No Christians were found to be affected.

The FGM prevalence rate among girls under the age of 20 is a "mere" 15% which may indicate that the practice is about to decrease gradually. Among women aged 60-70, it is up to 80%.

When it comes to the reasons for the practice, the answers are evenly divided between "tradition" and "religion", i.e. Islam.

In most cases, FGM means the amputation of the clitoris. Some women however – in the Arab-dominated countryside it is 21% – experienced more severe types, including the cutting of the inner and/or outer labia.

The Kirkuk findings prove that FGM is a common practice also among non-Kurds – Sunnis and Shi'ites alike. **This data constitutes strong evidence for the assumption that FGM is prevalent throughout Iraq. Millions of women and girls are likely to be affected by these grave human rights violations.**

Therefore, we call on the Baghdad parliament to address the issue as soon as possible, support public awareness and discuss further ways to counter female genital mutilation in Iraq.

The complete study will be published in June 2012.

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ⁱ Female Genital Mutilation in Iraqi Kurdistan. An Empirical Study by WADI." Frankfurt 2010.
http://www.stopfgmkurdistan.org/study_fgm_iraqi_kurdistan_en.pdf

ⁱⁱ HRW: "They Took Me and Told Me Nothing." New York 2010.

<http://www.hrw.org/de/reports/2010/06/16/they-took-me-and-told-me-nothing-0>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.stopfgmkurdistan.org/>