Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting: Knowledge and Attitudes of Pediatricians in the United States

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RESEARCH QUESTION: A survey-based study that aims to develop a questionnaire to measure knowledge, attitudes, and practices of pediatricians nationally in the United States surrounding female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C).

BACKGROUND

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C) as “all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.” FGM/C is recognized as a violation of human rights, however, more than 200 million girls and women alive today in over 30 countries have experienced FGM/C. It is typically performed on girls between the ages 0-15.

Global immigration has resulted in significant growth of immigrant populations in the United States (US), including those from countries that practice FGM/C. It is estimated that approximately 545,000 girls and women in the US are at risk or have been cut, with approximately 200,000 being those under 18 years of age. In the US, the practice of FGM/C within the United States and the travel out of the country for FGM/C procedures is illegal.

Despite the increasing pertinence of FGM/C risk to young children in western countries, there are few studies that focus on pediatricians. Pediatricians are uniquely positioned to identify risk in children and therefore prevent the practice. Sureshkumar et al in Australia were the first to conduct a national survey of pediatricians’ knowledge, attitudes, and clinical experience with FGM/C, which highlighted that a majority of pediatricians in Australia have little to no experience with FGM/C. In the US, there is only one small regional study, by Young et al, that concluded that pediatricians in the US are not trained to diagnose or manage FGM/C and are not conducting routine external genital examinations on their female patients, such that FGM/C is often missed.

METHODS

This study’s goal is to document US pediatricians’ knowledge, attitudes, and clinical practices surrounding female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C) in order to identify knowledge gaps. Our questionnaire is designed to determine the training needs of pediatricians in the US in regard to identifying girls at risk of FGM/C and to educating parents against the practice of FGM/C. Multiple specialties—general, adolescent health, and child abuse pediatricians—are surveyed in order to better identify and compare educational needs between groups. Finally, we will determine what clinical presentations pediatricians believe are reportable, what clinical presentations have pediatricians encountered, and what factors affect reporting FGM/C.

REFERENCES


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