

# Implications of understanding female genital mutilation through the nexus of structure and agency

A critical review and analysis of scholarly literature concerning the issue of fgm

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## Abstract

Female genital mutilation (fgm) is defined as altering or injuries to the female genitalia for non-medical reasons. Fgm is a bundle of procedures, with a great variety in severity and complications, practiced in various geographical areas, practiced in all ages, and for various reasons. The issue of fgm has attained both scholarly and public attention sporadically in history. Moreover, the practice of fgm is closely entangled with concepts of gender, sexuality, body, emotions, culture, and politics. Hence, the issue is highly contentious. The practices of fgm have been condemned by several NGOs, IOs and governments, and a worldwide ban on fgm was set out by the UN in 2012. One of the strategies used in the elimination of fgm is outlawing the practice, and “clauses prohibiting the practice have been incorporated into a large number of international legal instruments and into the legislation of a growing number of countries” (WHO 2020). Nevertheless, the practice is nowhere to be eliminated and due to high population growth and large population of youths in places where fgm is being practice, the number of girls subjected to fgm is estimated to rise in the coming years (UNFPA 2018). This estimation is relevant if the practice continues to be practiced at current levels (ibid.). This problematization indicates the importance to address the issue of fgm, and especially with regard to the elimination of the harmful practice. Hence, the existence and relevance of the thesis presented here.

Following the assumption that the knowledge produced in academia is shaping particular perspectives, which are furthermore influencing the perspectives of the ones who are implementing fgm elimination strategies and activities, an extensive literature analysis of the current scholarly approach to the issue of fgm is of utmost importance. Which underlines both why this thesis is important and the purpose of it. Inspired by an empirical study of research I carried out in Tanzania during an internship in the fall of 2019, this thesis expands on the insights gained and the academic project the internship resulted in.

With the hypothesis that current scholarly literature on the issue of fgm could benefit from an incorporation of a theoretical framework including considerations of structure and agency, the thesis aims at investigating if such a theoretical framework is already included in the literature. Moreover, the thesis explores how such an incorporation could affect the

understanding of the elimination of fgm. To carry out the just-mentioned investigation, the thesis explores the theoretical framework of structuration theory, and critically review and analyze a body of scholarly literature consisting of 70 articles from scholars from various disciplinary fields. The qualitative content analysis is carried out with the help of various predefined concepts, in combination with concepts which emerged during the study. Overall, the analysis explores various identified theoretical approaches to the issue of fgm. Moreover, the analysis focuses on identifying explanations in the scholarly literature with regard to four main categories; understanding of fgm, reasons for continuation of fgm, challenges in the elimination of fgm, and strategies in the elimination of fgm.

In light of the structuration theory, the findings show that none of the 70 articles include considerations of both structure and agency in their approach to the issue of fgm. However, several of the articles draw on various concepts similar to the concepts of structuration theory. For instance, several articles connect fgm to the concept of structure in different ways. Nevertheless, the analysis in combination with the application of structuration theory, demonstrates that a great part of the current scholarly literature on the issue of fgm could benefit from incorporating considerations of structure and agency in their approach to the issue of fgm. Especially, with regard to the understanding of the elimination of the practice.

It can be concluded that the thesis explores how a theoretical framework including considerations of structure and agency may affects the understanding of the elimination of fgm. Moreover, the thesis illustrates how such an approach to the issue could widen the scope of the understanding of the issue of fgm, and moreover, may be useful in the future research on developing strategies to implement change in the social structures which are encouraging fgm to continue. In other words, this thesis contributes with relevant and interesting considerations, which are important in order to fully understand the complexity of fgm and thus, moreover, may advance the perception of how to successfully eliminate the practices of fgm.

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## Introduction

Globally, it is estimated that 200 million girls and women alive today have been subjected to the practice of female genital mutilation (WHO 2020b). The practice of female genital mutilation (fgm) has attained both scholarly and public attention at local, national and international level sporadically in history. Fgm has been condemned based on different articles in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948, but it was first later, in comments and recommendation to the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights from 1966 and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women from 1979, that fgm practices were specifically incorporated into the just-mentioned conventions (UNFPA 2019). Later, several UN conferences and declarations during the 1990's called for the need for governments to take the necessary steps to stop the practice, as well as to develop policies and programs to eliminate fgm (ibid.).

The worldwide ban of fgm practices peaked in 2012 when the UN General Assembly passed five resolutions urging countries to condemn harmful practices such as fgm, as well as taking all necessary measures to protect girls and women from this form of violence (UN News 2012). In addition, the elimination of fgm has been acknowledged by several other intergovernmental organizations such as the African Union, the European Union, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (UN News 2017). Despite a comprehensive outlawing of the practice worldwide, the practicing of fgm around the world is nowhere near eliminated<sup>1</sup>. The fact that outlawing legislation has been in place for several decades, without successfully eliminating the practice, might suggest a need to consider the strategies used. Moreover, it calls for an exploration of how the issue of fgm is being approached, and this is the purpose of the thesis presented here.

The inspiration for this thesis comes from lived experiences gained during my 9<sup>th</sup> semester internship in Tanzania during the fall of 2019. Tanzania is one of the 29 African countries

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<sup>1</sup> Noteworthy, academics have questioned the reasoning behind the international condemnation and strive to eliminate fgm. This thesis is based on the assumption that fgm is both harmful and gender-discriminating. Hence, neither time nor space is assigned to elaborate on the reasons why fgm should be eliminated.

where fgm practices is known to still be prevalent (UNFPA 2019), although, fgm was nationally outlawed in Tanzania in 1998 with section 169A of the Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act (UN 2009). Motivated by an eagerness to learn more about the practice of fgm, and hopefully get a greater insight into the issues of the elimination of the practice, I did an internship in a Tanzanian NGO called Nafgem (Networking Against Female Genital Mutilation). Nafgem was founded in 1999 and is the largest organization in Tanzania focusing on the elimination of fgm, child marriage and early pregnancy, as well as other aspects of gender-based discrimination and violence.

During the three months I was an intern at Nafgem, I learned a lot about the practices of fgm and other aspects of gender-based violence and discrimination. In addition, I got to experience a society where these harmful practices are being practiced and I quickly noticed factors of gender-inequality present in these fgm practicing societies. Furthermore, I worked closely with girls who have run from their homes and left their families due to fgm and child marriage. Many of the girls I met and befriended told me stories about their experiences coming from societies where fgm and child marriage are commonalities. Their stories and my lived experiences in Tanzania, sparked an interest in examining the underlying reasons people practice fgm. This interest became the motivation for my internship-based project. The internship project opened my eyes to some of the underlying challenges of eliminating fgm and exemplified the problematic nexus regarding formal rules which may change overnight, like the outlawing of fgm, in comparison to how informal rules “embodied in custom, traditions and codes of conduct are much more impervious to deliberate policies” (North 1990: in Krook & Mackay 2010:11). Moreover, other similar questions emerged in the wake of the internship project, which inspired me to explore these questions further. Ultimately, the findings from my internship-based project are the inspiration for the examination presented in this thesis.

### [Fgm in Maasai society](#)

The internship project will be more closely reviewed later, however, due to how the thesis draws upon the findings from that project, it is appropriate to explain the internship project in short before proceeding. With a problem formulation focusing on the underlying challenges of eliminating fgm in Maasai societies, I constructed a qualitative case study. The study

combined theory of feminist institutionalism with empirical data gathered from girls from Maasai societies and employees at Nafgem. The project had the overall aim to provide a better understanding of how fgm fits into the structural gender-inequality in Maasai societies. By using the theory of feminist institutionalism (Chapell 2013, Krook & Mackay 2010), I could examine the Maasai society as an informal institution with a specific gender regime. This gender regime is producing and reproducing a specific gender dimension, which results in specific outcomes for the lived lives of women and men in that society. The empirical data used in the analysis illustrated, that fgm practices are only one part of an institutional structure, where gender-inequality is being produced and reproduced continuously. With the theoretical approach of feminist institutionalism, the analysis of the respondents' answers indicated a "gender regime with different institutional structures which are interconnected and, in their various ways, are contributing to the continuing of fgm practices" (Johannessen 2020:22). This structure was furthermore graphically presented as an overview over various interconnected institutional factors which are encouraging fgm to continue (Figure 1).

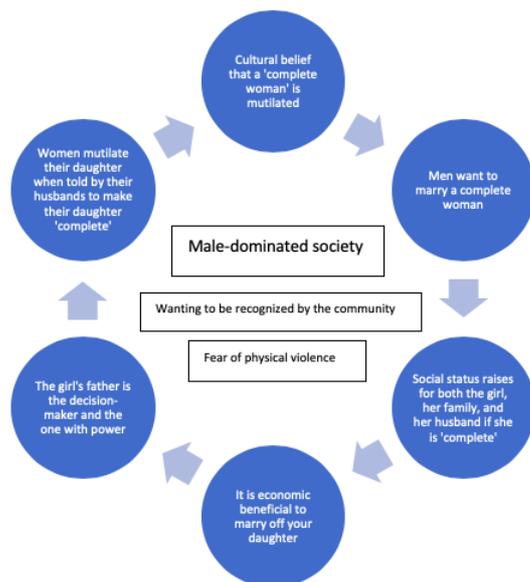


Figure 1 (Johannessen 2020:21)

Ultimately, the internship-based project demonstrated why fgm should not be understood as an isolated issue. On the contrary, fgm should be understood in its complexity, while incorporating the understanding of how fgm fits into a structure as showed in the figure above. This fgm encouraging structure became noticeable as the result of the internship-based project, and the project suggests that these structures should be changed and erupted,

for a successful elimination of fgm. When this understanding of the institutional structural factors and that the existence of these structures are encouraging the continuing of fgm, is achieved, the next step should be to develop specific strategies (and theory) on how to change the unequal gender regime and the current institutional structure. Such strategies implemented could hopefully change the status quo and finally, enable the elimination of fgm practices.

### What is next?

One of the findings from the internship-based project, was that the Maasai societies were male-dominated with a high prevalence of gender-based violence, two structural factors which play an important role in the constitution of the current gender regime. However, through the empirical data, it became clear that the women in the society are the ones who are performing the genital mutilations. Thus, the women are agents who continue producing and reproducing the current institutional structure, and seemingly, the women are also encouraging the practice of fgm to exist. However, as the results of the project showed, it is not as simplistic. Moreover, the women's role in the continuing of the structure which encourages fgm seems just as important as the other structural factors in the institutional gender regime. This sparks an interesting question regarding structure and agency. Namely, the question whether the structure is influencing the women's autonomy and thus their choices regarding their exercises of agency, or if their agency is creating and encouraging the existence of the current structure. Either way, this is a link which needs to be examined and understood if the aim is to understand how to enable change of the current structure. This nexus of agency and structure with regard to fgm is the core of the problem presented here.

The results from the internship-based project promote an approach which implies that, in the elimination of fgm, one could benefit from including theories within the field of agency and structure with regard to develop specific strategies to implement change. These strategies should exemplify how to change the current structure and thus, challenge the continuation of fgm. Consequently, such an examination should expectantly contribute positively in the elimination of fgm practices. The investigation of the existence of such an approach is the overall aim of the following project. By analytically examining pre-existing literature on the issue of fgm, an overview of how scholars understand fgm practices, will hopefully indicate

ways in which the literature on the issue of fgm could benefit from a theoretical approach including considerations of both structure and agency. Especially, in tackling the question of how to successfully eliminate fgm practices. Accordingly, the motivation and existence of this thesis with the following problem formulation;

***How does current scholarship address the issue of female genital mutilation and how can a theoretical framework incorporating both structure and agency affect the understanding of fgm with regard to its elimination?***

## Problem formulation

The problem formulation is generated through an iterative approach and it captures the main aim of the thesis accurate, as it reflects both the findings from my internship-based project as well as an examination of how the current scholarship address the issue of fgm. Furthermore, it indicates a hypothesis that the current literature could benefit from a theoretical framework incorporating considerations of structure and agency, which implies that such a theoretical framework is not incorporated in the current literature already. The hypothesis and the reasoning for it will be elaborated on later in the project.

The problem formulation outlines somehow a three-part project. One part examining (i) how different scholars address the issue of fgm. This part consists of the literature review and analysis chapter. Part two, (ii) examining a structure-agency theoretical framework will be explored in the chapters; *Internship-based project* and *Theoretical framework of structuration theory*. One last part, combining the two previous parts by (iii) examining how a consolidation could be fruitful with regards to the understanding of the elimination of fgm, will be explored in the *Discussion* chapter. The specific outline of the thesis is somewhat distinctive and the reasoning for why things are appearing in the specific order, as seen in the *Table of Content*, is a result of the methodological approach in the thesis and the deductive aspect of the project. To explore the hypothesis, it is essential to examine where the hypothesis comes from and thus, part two will be examined and explored before part one. Naturally, prior to any of the three parts, a brief conceptualization of the issue of fgm, followed by a thorough methodology chapter, are necessary.

## Elaboration on female genital mutilation

Fgm (female genital mutilation) is an umbrella term used to describe procedures involving various kinds of altering or injuring the female genitalia. Fgm as a single term may be misleading, as it is a bundle of different procedures, in diverse geographical locations, with different meanings, carried out in all ages, and this diversity within the term should be acknowledged. The World Health Organization (WHO) has defined fgm as “all procedure that involved partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons” (WHO 2020b). Furthermore, the WHO has categorized fgm into four major types;

Type 1: partial or total removal of the clitoral glans [...], and/or the prepuce/clitoral hood [...]

Type 2: partial or total removal of the clitoral glans and the labia minora [...], with or without removal of the labia majora [...].

Type 3: also known as infibulation, this is the narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the labia minora, or labia majora, sometimes through stitching, with or without removal of the clitoral prepuce/clitoral hood and glans.

Type 4: this includes all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, e.g. pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing the genital area. (ibid)

Numerous physical and psychological immediate and long-term consequences and implications of fgm are reported with varying severity, including death (UNFPA 2020). The procedures have existed for thousands of years, and it has been practiced in different geographical areas and for different reasons through history. In example, in Europe, mutilations of the female genitalia were practiced as a cure to different ‘diseases’ in the nineteenth century. For instance, the British surgeon Isaac Baker-Brown is well known for performing “clitoridectomies on women with diagnoses as diverse as urinary incontinence, uterine haemorrhage, epilepsy, hysteria, idiocy and mania” (Johnsdotter 2012:105). Today, fgm practices, in different forms and varieties, are practiced in scattered areas of “Africa, in some countries in the Middle East and Asia, as well as among migrants from these areas” (UN 2020).

The typology used regarding these procedures has changed through history. In the beginning of the international attention to the issue the practice was referred to as ‘female

circumcision', and this term is still used in some places and by some scholars. However, 'female circumcision' has been criticized for drawing a parallel with male circumcision, and for not grasping the severity of the effects of the practice. As a result, the term 'female genital mutilation' gained support in the 1970's and 'fgm' is the term adopted by the WHO and the UN (UNFPA 2019). However, in the 1990's the term 'female genital cutting', and 'fgm/c' were introduced as a response to the risen dissatisfaction with the term 'mutilation', as some argues that the term 'mutilation' could be perceived demeaning and bearing specific cultural values. This project uses the term 'fgm', but still acknowledges the variation of the procedures, consequences, as well as the experiences of the practices. However, I believe that to recognize the cruelty of the procedures, as well as to support a full abandonment of the practices, the term 'fgm' is appropriate. Additionally, I support the perception that it is possible to name the procedures 'fgm' and still not be cultural imperialistic or demeaning in the approach to the issue.

## Methodology

### Point of departure

According to the problem formulation presented, the thesis contains a review of how current academic literature addresses the issue of fgm. Moreover, how the current literature can benefit from a structure-agency theoretical framework, as the findings from my internship-project suggests. All the sources used in the literature review and the structure-agency framework, are of an academic nature as they are published in acknowledged academic journals. I recognize that only including texts produced in an academic context, influences the type of knowledge framework that is being analyzed. Consequently, the analysis lacks the theoretical framework of how for instance NGOs or governments address the issue of fgm. However, I argue that the knowledge produced and reproduced in academia is shaping particular perspectives which are furthermore shaping and influencing the perspectives of the ones implementing fgm eliminating strategies and activities. Hence, it is important to recognize the role scholars play when addressing any topic, and in this case, the issue of fgm. Arguing that scholars' approach to fgm have practical implication in real life, emphasizes the importance of an analysis of the current literature on the issue of fgm and thus, is underlining the importance of this project.

As the hypothesis suggests, a combination of a structure-agency theoretical framework and the identified scholarly approaches, may provide practical implications for the understanding of how to eliminate fgm. By answering the problem formulation posed, the thesis may thus affect the understanding of the elimination of fgm. However, this project has, like all research, some limitations. Due to the scope and nature of this research, the main limitation results from the amount of literature it is possible to review to answer the problem formulation. Consequently, there will always be data un-reviewed or un-available for the researcher, which affects the data saturation, and thus, the findings from the thesis. Nevertheless, by providing transparency combined with a desire to strive for authenticity throughout the project, the presented research entails possibilities for social science knowledge production.

## Theory of science

Prior to any research, the researcher has a perception and beliefs regarding the nature of reality, which unavoidably influences the research. An honest elaboration of the researcher's philosophical beliefs is hence necessary for the research to be trustworthy and reliable. Epistemology and ontology are two separate, but intertwined fields of philosophy. Philosophical positions within epistemology are concerned with "what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline" (Bryman 2016:24). A traditionally distinction is made between the position of positivism and interpretivism. Positivism affirms and advocates for the application of the methods and principles of the natural sciences. While interpretivism is critical to positivism and hence pose a view that social science is "fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences" (op.cit.:26). This thesis neglects the objectivist position posed by the doctrine of positivism, but affirms the view that "social reality has a meaning for human beings and therefore human action is meaningful" (op.cit.:27). Consequently, I recognize the role of the researcher as active in the study and part of the knowledge production, and thus, the researcher's interpretations and perceptions influence the outcome of the research. Philosophical positions within ontology are concerned with what is true or real, and the nature of reality. Regarding the ontological question of what exists, ontological positions disagree, and a divide has been made between the position of objectivism and constructivism. Objectivism implies that social phenomena exist as external facts independent of social actors. Consequently, the social reality is perceived as having an objective reality, and thus, is beyond our reach or influence (op.cit.:29). Constructivism, on the contrary, "implies that social phenomena are not only produced through social interaction but are in a constant revision" (ibid.). Ultimately, the social reality is perceived as both reachable and continually influenced by social actors.

The ontological position in this research is constructivism, which is inseparable from the epistemological position of interpretivism. The positions intertwined, results in the position of social constructivism, which accurate reflects the research posed here. This philosophical position has various practical implications for the research. First, it is a position which supports the chosen research methods and theoretical framework. Second, it is in line with both the internship-based project and the posed hypothesis, the thesis draws upon. Recalling the reason of existence of the thesis, namely, the hypothesis that the understanding of how to

eliminate fgm could benefit from a structure-agency framework, the thesis is greatly reliant on a social constructivist position. The perception that structures are socially constructed, allows the thesis to consider how structures may be resistant or subjected to change. Ultimately, by drawing on the position of social constructivism, the thesis recognizes a link between agency and structures. Moreover, the social constructivist perception allows the thesis to explore the possibilities of subjecting the socially constructed reality to change through social actors, with regard to the understanding of eliminating fgm.

### Research strategy

It could be argued that a literature review, as the one posed in this project, may seem deductive, as it is somehow a testing of the thesis' hypothesis. Thus, the project "entails a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which the accent is placed on the testing of theories" (Bryman 2016:32). Another strategy in this project is the emphasis put on descriptive analysis and quantitative data distribution in the literature review. However, the other part of the project (and which I would argue is the essence of the project), is the inductive generation of theory as a result of the consolidation of the literature review, the findings from my internship-project, and the structure-agency theoretical framework. Overall, great insistence throughout the project is put on the strategy of adopting an iterative approach. The iterative approach is the most appropriate due to my conviction that in social science, the research processes can almost never be purely deductive nor inductive, as a result of the unavoidable influence of the researcher.

### Literature review

Whereas reviewing the existing literature related to the topic of a project is often associated with being one of the first steps in conducting social research (Bryman 2016:90), this is not the case in this thesis. The task of searching the literature "at this early stage involves reviewing the main ideas and research relating to your chosen area of interest. This provides the basis for the writing a literature review, which forms an important part of the dissertation." (ibid.) This suggests that a literature review is aimed at investigating what is already known and to establish the pre-existing ideas about the chosen topic. Moreover, it is understood as a prelude to the researcher's own research. This thesis challenges this

traditional account of a literature review, as the literature review presented here is not a springboard for an investigation, it is the investigation itself.

The current literature review is closely related to what Bruce (Bruce 1994 in Bryman 2016:94) calls a 'report'. 'Report' is the concept where the literature review is "understood as a written discussion of the literature, drawing on previously conducted investigations" (ibid.). Additionally, the current literature review includes several of the other five concepts listed by Bruce, such as being; 1. a 'list' "comprising pertinent items representing the literature" (ibid.), 2. a 'search' "going through sources to identify information" (ibid.), 3. a 'survey' where the literature review is seen as an investigation (either critical, analytical or descriptive) and 4., a 'vehicle' for learning, where the student "can check ideas or personal perceptions" (ibid.). The literature review in this thesis is both a review and analysis of how the current literature addresses the issue of fgm. Thus, the current literature review can be understood as a combination of all the concepts listed above. In addition, it may seem useful to understand the literature review as constructed by writers to achieve several things such as to "develop their version of the literature in such a way as to show and to lead up to the contribution they will be making in the article" (Bryman 2016:93) and a "gap or problem in the literature that is identified corresponds to the research questions" (ibid.). These two things are relevant for the literature review in this thesis.

Due to the nature of this project, great emphasis has been put on the method of retrieving the articles used in the literature review and analysis. The Success Strategy was adopted to conduct a structured literature search. A structured literature search should not be confused with a systematic review, which is too extensive to carry out on the premise of the scope and time limit of the thesis (Bryman 2016:99). All the steps of the Success Strategy will be elaborated below as a means to operationalize the criteria for the search. The aim with this operationalization is to add both validity and reliability of the literature review and consequently, the findings of the analysis.

In the light of the just-explored accounts of a literature review, I would argue that the literature review presented here transcends the traditional notion of a literature review. The literature review is neither a review of pre-existing literature considered as a separate

element, a prelude for the research, nor is it a piece of research with its own end. Differently, the literature review in this thesis is the empirical data of the project, and is thus, subjected to the analysis and moreover plays a crucial part in the overall investigation of the relevant problem formulation.

### Structured literature search

Following the assumption that searching for information is a “sequence of interrelated actions aimed at accomplishing the search assignment. Every action determines the course of the searching, and thus affects its final results” (Zins 2000:1232), the following structured search draws on the search strategy called the Success Strategy. A strategy developed in 1994, with the aim to construct a systematic search strategy “based on rational searching procedures and techniques” (ibid.). The strategy solves two common problems in information search. First, ‘blind’ or ‘random’ searches usually provide the researcher with either nothing or thousands of useless results. In addition, with the researcher’s reasoning as part of the searching process, the strategy will shorten and improve the search results (ibid.). Second, by using the principles of a systematic search, the researcher’s part in retrieving the literature used will be operationalized and, thus, generate an unbiased and transparent process contributing to the validity of the results.

The five successive phases and guidelines of the Success strategy is called “the Five Ws: What, Where, Words, Work, Wow” (op.cit.:1237) and consist of the following seven generic guidelines: “(1) define the assignment, (2) locate resources, (3) choose search words, (4) select methodology, (5) execute the search, (6) evaluate the results, and (7) if necessary, repeat the search by refining your previous decisions” (ibid.). Through actively using the just-mentioned phases and guidelines, some criteria were adopted in order to perform the literature search.

Through an iterative approach, an approach applied throughout the exploring of the various generic guidelines, the different ‘5 Ws’ where defined and used in the literature research. The first step is to define the subject for the literature search, which will define the ‘what’. In this case, drawing on the current problem formulation of this research, the subject was defined as “*How current theoretical approaches understand fgm, explanations for fgm continuation and strategies for its elimination*”. Furthermore, five different key concepts were identified with

the means to point out the various concepts within the chosen subject. The relevant concepts were defined as being the following; 1. Female genital mutilation, 2. Reasons (for fgm continuation), 3. Challenges (to eliminate fgm), 4. Strategies (to stop fgm) and, 5. Elimination (of fgm). In order to define specific search words, the just-mentioned concepts were further explored with the aim to identify alternative words to describe the key concepts. This strategy is applied in the search as the subject may be expressed in various ways in the literature. Alternative words for the five different key concepts were explored as the following; 1. 'Female genital mutilation', 'Fgm', 'Fgm/c', 2. 'Reasons', 'Motivations', 'Factors', 'Beliefs', 3. 'Challenges', 'Obstacles', 'Struggle', 4. 'Strategies', 'Efforts', 'Tools', and 5. 'Elimination', 'Eradicate'.

After defining the 'what' and the 'words', the next step in the success strategy is the 'work', meaning, the construction of the literature search. Academic databases will only provide you with the literature matching the specific words you will feed it. By using various search techniques such as combining words using 'AND', 'OR', expanding words using '\*', and phrase search using ".", the following advanced search was constructed;

fgm OR fgm/c OR "female genital mutilation" [keywords]

Reason\* OR motivation OR factor\* OR belief\* [anywhere]

Challenges OR obstacle\* OR struggle [anywhere]

Strateg\* OR effort\* OR tool\*[anywhere]

Eliminat\* OR eradicat\*[anywhere]

In an endless pool of literature available online, using all the different key concepts of the subject in the search is necessary in locating only the most relevant literature. The means of differentiating between which words that could appear anywhere in the text or as keywords, is to secure that the literature retrieved in the search is mainly focusing on the subject of fgm, as this is the core of the subject. I acknowledge that the exploration of the different concepts and alternative words defined and used in this search is a result of "the searcher's reasoning" (Zins 2000:1232).

The advanced search was executed in three different databases. Those being; 1. Sage Journal, 2. Taylor & Francis Online and 3. Wiley Online Library. These databases were chosen because

they cover academic literature in the fields of social and cultural science, and they all have a high reputation as scholarly channels of publication. Applying the constructed advanced search, in addition to a publication date limit between the years 2000 and 2020, as well as including only English articles, a total of 82 articles were retrieved in the search. Four articles appearing in the search were not accessible and eight articles were identified as 'errors'. For instance, the keyword 'fgm' appeared in one article as referring to 'flamelet generated manifold' in an article on the issue of safety concerns in petrochemical industries. Such 'errors' exemplifies how a search engine can let through results which are irrelevant to the issue at hand. Ultimately, 12 articles were excluded, leaving 70 articles to be reviewed.

### Empirical data

Even though much social research is carried out through interaction with people, this is not always the case, nor is it in this project. Nevertheless, data collection and data analysis are two key elements in any research project, regardless of the subject or case under research. The structured literature search, as elaborated above, is the sampling of data and method of data collection in this project. The adopted principles of sampling, which the structured literature search compose, are not based on "the idea of representativeness but on the notion that samples should be selected on the basis of their appropriateness to the purposes of the investigation" (Bryman 2016:10).

Whereas Bryman (2016) distinguishes between quantitative content analysis and qualitative data analysis, this project conforms more to what may be called qualitative content analysis. Considering that quantitative content analysis "typically entails applying predefined categories to the sources" (Bryman 2016:564) with little or no potential for refinement of those categories during the study, this is not the method applied here. The iterative approach applied creates a reflexivity in this regard. By being systematic and analytic in doing the study, guided by some initial categories (the key concepts defined in the structured search) but, likewise allowing generation of new categories, subcategories and themes to emerge during the study, the thesis leans towards the qualitative analytical method.

In contrast to the seemingly unambiguous set of rules put forward to handle the data in a traditional quantitative data analysis, in qualitative data analysis the procedure is somewhat

more baffling. However, through some guidelines to handle the richness and cumbersome nature of qualitative data, one will be able to analyze the data in a way giving the data a wider significance for social science (Bryman 2016:570). Following Graneheim and Lundman (2003), content analysis initially dealt with the quantitative description of content communication, but has, however, over time, expanded to include qualitative interpretations (ibid.). Moreover, Graneheim and Lundman combine the qualitative focus on latent content, that is, “what the text is talking about” (op.cit.:111), namely, the interpretive part of the method, together with the quantitative focus on manifest content, that is, “what the text says” (ibid.), which is the descriptive part of the method. Thus, the concepts of qualitative content analysis are highly appropriate in analyzing the current literature review. Specific concepts of importance related to qualitative content analysis such as “unit of analysis, meaning unit, condensing, abstracting, content area, code, category and theme” (op.cit.:106) will be further elaborated on below, in order to achieve trustworthiness of the upcoming analysis.

### Qualitative content analysis

As just explained and justified, the method of analyzing the current literature retrieved, is qualitative content analysis. Even though the data in the thesis is not the traditional qualitative empirical data, the unit of analysis in qualitative content analysis can vary greatly in both nature and size. Some authors consider a unit of analysis as referring to a person or organization (Mertens 1998 in Graneheim & Lundman 2003:106), a community or state (Patton 1987 in ibid.), interview or diaries (Downe-Wamboldt 1992 in ibid.), part of a text (Weber 1990 in ibid.) or even a phrase or word (Freeley and Gottlieb 1998 in ibid.). Following Graneheim and Lundman, a suitable unit of analysis is “large enough to be considered a whole and small enough to be possible to keep in mind as a context for the meaning unit, during the analysis process” (ibid.). Based on that definition, the whole body of literature retrieved in the structured literature search, is considered the unit of analysis in the current content analysis.

Furthermore, a meaning unit is a “constellation of words or statements that relate to the same central meaning” (ibid.) and is central in the procedure of locating parts of the unit of analysis containing aspects related to analysis. In this case, the different articles are defined as the meaning units, as they are constellations of statements relating to the same central meaning, if one understands the ‘central meaning’ as being how the current literature addresses the

issue of fgm. A further step in the analysis process is decreasing the text, defined as condensation as it “refers to a process of shortening while still preserving the core” (ibid.). To systematize the condensed text, another concept is introduced, namely, abstraction, which refers to the internal process whereby the text is abstracted on a higher logical level. This is done through “creations of codes, categories and themes on varying levels” (ibid.). In this way, it is possible to process great amount of data and analyze only its core.

Creation of codes, categories and themes are some core concepts of many, if not most, qualitative analysis. A code is agreed upon as being a label of a meaning unit (op.cit.:107) and is used to allow the data “to be thought about in new and different ways” (ibid.). It can be assigned to various things and should be understood in relation to the context (ibid.). In this case, codes are somewhat excess because the meaning units are whole articles. A more relevant concept for this qualitative content analysis, is the creation of categories. Categories refers to a “group of content that shares a commonality” (ibid.). Even though it may be argued that categories should be mutually exclusive, meaning that no data should fall in-between two categories or fit into more than one category, this is not always possible. Nevertheless, creation of categories is an important tool in abstracting and analyzing the data. Moreover, sub-categories may emerge as division of a category or sub-categories may be created and then being abstracted into a category. Another relevant concept is the concept of themes. Searching for themes in data is used in several qualitative methods, and definitions and meanings of themes are multiple. “A theme can be seen as an expression of the latent content of the text” (ibid.) and is understood as the abstracted interpreted underlying meaning in the condensed meaning units, codes or categories.

The just-explored process of a qualitative content analysis has some practical implication for the analysis in this project. For instance, whereas themes may seem to represent the latent content of the text, categories seem to represent the manifest content of the text. Arguable, the themes are more interpretive and the categories more descriptive. Nevertheless, “a text always involves multiple meanings and the researcher’s interpretation is influenced by his or her personal history” (op.cit.:107) and thus, that creation of both categories and themes are inevitably influenced by the researcher’s reasoning. Ultimately, the whole body of literature was closely reviewed, and initial categories from the structured search together with sub-

categories which emerged during the study, were used to analyze the articles. An overview template of the various concepts in the analysis process, where used to structure and analyze the literature. The template is illustrated in the figure below (Figure 2) and will be further explained during the analysis. Even though the description above describes a linear process, the process of the analysis involved an iterative process including a reflexive movement.

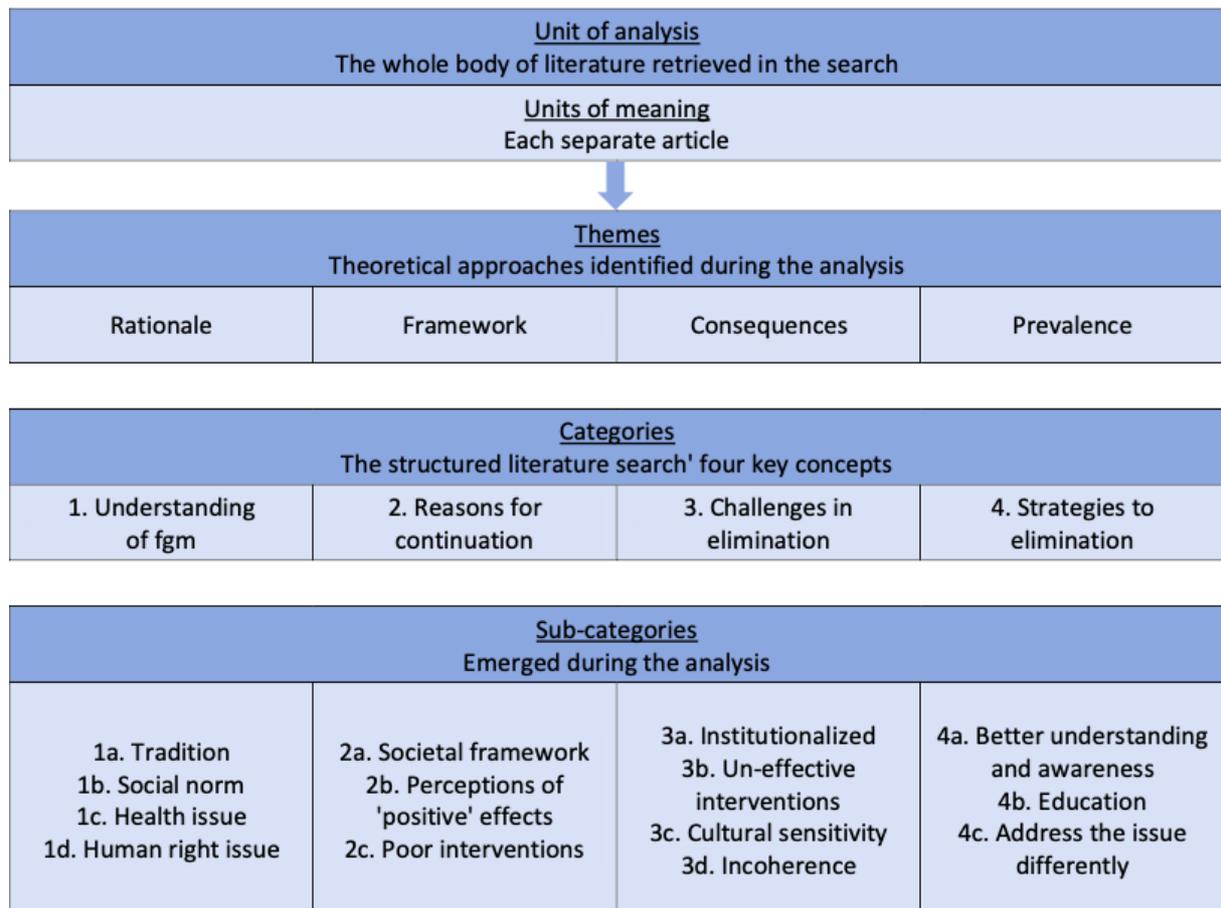


Figure 2. An overview template illustrating the use of concepts such as unit of analysis, units of meaning, themes, categories and sub-categories with regards to the content analysis presented later

## Internship-based project

Before presenting the theoretical framework of structuration theory, and moreover proceed with the analysis, I find it necessary to explain some elements of my internship-based project, as the findings and insight gained from that project is what the posed hypothesis and the choice of theoretical framework, are based on.

During my internship at Nafgem, I worked closely with the social worker at the office who was responsible for everything regarding the girls staying at Nafgem's safe shelter, and naturally, I spent a lot of time with the girls staying there. Throughout my internship, I was not only working in the office, but I was also cooking, eating and socializing with the girls at the shelter, spending several nights and weekends together with them and joining them in their everyday activities. In addition to engaging in countless conversations with both co-workers and the girls staying at the shelter, I spent several days in the field on different occasions, met and talked to a lot of people, went to various events, and I was attending and executing fgm awareness activities. The knowledge I achieved during these activities suggested that the issue of fgm is very complex, and moreover, that fgm is interconnected with other structural factors in the societies where fgm is being practiced. This attained insight was a premise of how I constructed my internship-based project.

The internship project entails thus an inductive character and it is partly based on the perception that it could be beneficial to examine the issue of fgm in Maasai societies, as part of a gender regime and structure, instead of as an isolated issue. The project was moreover sparked by a seeming lack in the literature providing such an analysis. In the literature search leading up to the internship project, it was identified that commonly in the literature about fgm, scholars "focus either on condemning the practices and explore its cruel consequences, exploring how the issue fits into the debate of universalism vs. cultural relativism or what kind of discourse is used in the debate on the issue" (Johannessen 2020:4). Even though scholars may have examined the reasoning behind practicing fgm in different communities and noted challenges with eliminating the practices before, an analysis of fgm in connection with a theoretical framework considering the gender regime with regard to fgm, seemed to be

missing. Hence, this research gap provided the reasoning for the analysis provided in the internship-based project.

The problem formulation structuring the project was; *An examination of the underlying challenges with eliminating fgm practices in Maasai societies*. Without rejecting the diversity and variation between different Maasai societies, one of the aims with the project was to provide a holistic analysis of the Maasai society. Such a holistic analysis aimed at providing the understanding of the relevant processes of gender and governance, to examine the gender-inequality produced in these societies. The theoretical framework of feminist institutionalism enabled me to carry out the project and moreover, demonstrate the institutional structures identified in the Maasai society illustrated in the model below (Figure 1). Drawing on theory from Chapell (2013) and Krook and Mackay (2010), I was able to examine the Maasai society as an informal institution, identify the institutional structures and thus, examine the current gender regime in these societies. Through the analysis of the empirical data combined with the theory of feminist institutionalism, the different factors such as “wanting to be recognized by the community, cultural-, social- and economic pressure in combination with male-domination as well as fear of physical violence” (Johannessen 2020:21) were identified as different institutional structures of the gender regime in Maasai societies. These institutional structures were presented in a figure as an overview, with the aim to underline the interconnectedness and complexity of the issue of fgm.

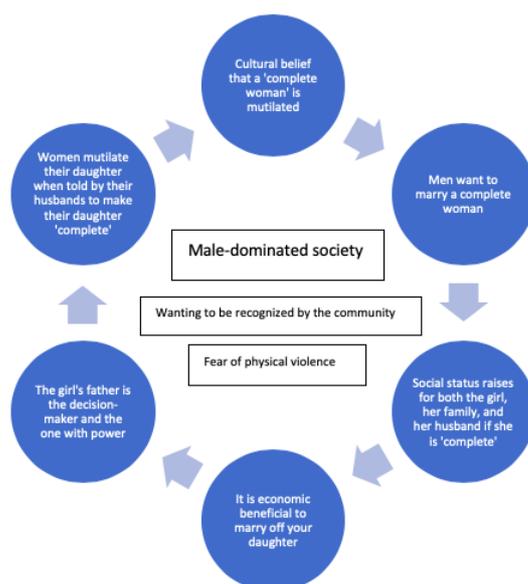


Figure 1 (Johannessen 2020:21)

The figure above can be used to schematically explain how fgm is continuing being practiced in Maasai societies. During the seven semi-structured interviews I carried out to gather empirical data for the internship-based project, it became clear that there were different 'underlying reasons' for practicing fgm. Those 'reasons' are the ones constituting the figure above (Figure 1). In the Maasai society context, the ideal of a 'complete woman' is synonymous with a woman who has undergone fgm. Commonly, girls want to be 'complete', parents want their daughters to be 'complete', and men want their future wives to be 'complete'. Additionally, in this context, marriageability is considered essential for the ability to sustain an appropriate and expected way of life. Hence, being 'complete' opens the door to social approval and marriage. The identification of these institutional structures of the Maasai society, manifested in the various 'reasons' for practicing fgm presented in the figure above, generated the implication that a change in one or several of these fgm encouraging structures, could contribute positively in the elimination of fgm. These findings from my internship-based project are what have led me to the perception that it could be beneficial to consider institutional structures and people's agency, with regards to the possibilities for change, when considering how to eliminate fgm. In other words, this thesis expands on the implications of the internship-based project.

### Feminist institutionalism

To further clarify the findings from the internship-based project, a short examination of the theoretical framework of feminist institutionalism may be useful. The understanding of gender, which the internship-based project draws upon, is the one coherent with feminist scholars working with gender and governance. They see gender not only as the "characteristic of women and men, but, more vitally, it [gender] also is a matter of the social relations within which individuals and groups act" (Connell 2002 in Chapell 2013:613). Moreover, gender is seen as a "process within institutions" (ibid.). This definition implies that gender is the social structure regulating the lives of women and men in a given institution. Thus, institutions produce and reproduce gender. An institution may be defined as both "the rule of the game in a society or ... the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction" (North 1990 in Krook & Mackay 2010:11), and the "structural feature of the society and/or the polity ... that may be formal [...] or informal" (Peter 1999:18 in ibid.). The theoretical framework of

feminist institutionalism explores the specific impact any institution has on the different genders, emphasizing “the ways in which institutions reflect, reinforce, and structure unequal gendered power relations in wider society” (Krook & Mackay 2010:6). This theoretical approach understands a gender regime as a structure which is defining rules of appropriate behavior and thus shapes societal norms and expectations. Feminist institutionalism was thus the cornerstone of the findings in the internship-based project. The theory enabled me to illustrate the structures, presented in the figure (Figure 1), when examining people’s agency and practices in the Maasai society. Feminist institutionalism is a social constructivist theory which aims at identifying the ‘invisible’ structures regulating behavior and social interaction. Additionally, with the perception that these structures may become visible through examining societal norms and expectations in a given institution.

Ultimately, the result of the internship project demonstrates how the gender regime in Maasai societies is characterized by interconnected institutional structures, which all are contributing to the continuing of fgm practices. Consequently, the project suggests that “the best way forward in the elimination of fgm in Maasai societies, is to change this gender regime” (Johannessen 2020:22). If any of the institutional structures which are producing and reproducing the current gender regime is changed, assumingly, the current gender regime would erupt, and this would probably affect the status quo with regard to fgm practices. However, this raises the next question which is posed in the subchapter *what is next?*, namely, how the relevant gender regime may be subjected to change. Answers from interviews carried out with five girls from Maasai societies, indicated that the institutional structures seem somehow impervious to change. The power of the current gender regime can be seen in how “the opportunity to resist the societal norms were non-existing. Both because denying [fgm] would result in physical violence and then it would still happen by force, or simply because there is no discourse of saying ‘no’” (Johannessen 2020:20).

In addition, several participants mentioned various incidents indicating that women have an active role in the un-equal gender regime in the societies. The active role women have in the gender regime can be exemplified in statements like “Maasai women value their men more than anything (...) sometimes the women are not giving the child food before the father. So, they are the one who are encouraging the things (female oppression) continue being there”

(Johannessen 2020:20), and how “women take pride in this [fgm] because when your husband tell you to prepare your daughter for the marriage, it is the duty of a women to make sure that your daughter goes through all traditions to make your daughter complete wife” (ibid.). This pinpoints the important question; whether agency only reflects structures or also reinforces them.

The just-mentioned statements suggest that the current gender regime is powerful and thus difficult to oppose through agency. Ultimately, people continue to act in accordance with what is appropriate and expected behavior. Consequently, the current structure is continually reproduced through people’s agency. Feminist institutionalism may provide an important theoretical tool to identify gender regimes by investigating institutional structures. However, the theory falls short in exploring the link between agency and structure, as well as the possibilities to change or erupt the identified structure. Thus, feminist institutionalism cannot be used to answer the question regarding how to change the current fgm continuing gender regime in Maasai societies. To explore that question, an examination of a theoretical framework including considerations of structure and agency is needed. Even though the thesis does not aim at answering that specific question, the thesis does imply that such a theoretical framework could be a useful part of the academic literature on the elimination of fgm. Thus, an elaboration of a theoretical framework of structure and agency is crucial for the analysis presented later.

## Theoretical framework of structuration theory

As elaborated on above, the thesis can be seen as expanding the findings from my internship-based project. The underlying premises of the thesis is that a theoretical framework of structure and agency may affect the understanding of how to eliminate fgm, as the problem formulation presented in the thesis indicates. Before turning to the literature review and analysis, a theoretical framework considering structure and agency should be examined. This chapter will entail such an examination and thus, constitutes the theoretical framework of the thesis.

The nexus of structure and agency is a field which divides the waters between researchers with different epistemological and ontological standpoints. As a result, structures are understood as operating at varying levels depending on the research lens. Structuration theory, as originally formulated by the British socialist Anthony Giddens, is one of the social theories used when considering the link between structure and agency, as well as how change happens or does not happen. By trying, as others before him, to build a bridge between the “position in the long-standing debate over whether social practices are best explained by some kind of natural science of society or by some version of the interpretative process of understanding” (Dickie-Clark 1984:92), Giddens’ structuration theory can be seen as a uniting operation. By drawing on existing explanatory and interpretative social theories, such as “phenomenology, hermeneutics, structuralism, systems theory and certain aspects of Marxism” (Op.cit.:93), with an integration of both “the simple juxtaposition of hermeneutics and naturalistic causation” (ibid.), Giddens’ theory of structuration is exceedingly complex. Hence, the various parts the theory consist of, should be seen as a close-knit “which does not allow itself to be broken down into parts which are readily comprehensible in isolation” (ibid.). However, such a divisive activity is needed when trying to present his account for the theory. Thus, below comes an attempt to explore important concepts in his structuration theory such as; criticism of pre-existing social theory, theory of social action, the notion of structure versus system, the concept of temporality, and the ‘dualism of structures’. These concepts will be elaborated on in turn, with help from the Canadian sociology scholar H. F. Dickie-Clark’s (1984)

presentation of Giddens' structuration theory<sup>2</sup>. Ultimately, the forthcoming chapter has the overall aim to provide an understanding of the link between structure and agency, and to identify the eventual possibilities for social change.

Giddens' structuration theory can be seen as an answer to five shortcomings he identified in the mainstream sociology. In short, these shortcomings may be reduced to; first, the 'natural science' self-understanding is too deterministic and as a result, it leaves out the autonomy possessed by social actors. Second, as a result of the former, the part where "language, consciousness and the consequent lay knowledge in the production of social reality is neglected" (op.cit.:94). Third, what he identifies as the orthodox consensus, which has inadequately integrated a theory of social interaction with theory of institutional analysis. The theory of structuration is his way to remedy these shortcomings. The result is a theoretical framework including both the autonomy possessed by social actors and the conscious consequent lay knowledge in the production of social reality, which moreover, is integrated as a rejoin theory emphasizing both theory of social interaction and theory of institutional analysis.

### Criticism of the three main frameworks of social theory

Giddens criticizes existing social theories for "their inability to account adequately for the role of actors and to show how face-to-face interaction could be integrated with institutional relations" (Dickie-Clark 1984:100). Giddens identifies social theory as divided into three main frameworks, namely interpretative theories, functionalism and structuralism. Interpretive theories include a theory of action or agency, but however are lacking an inclusion of the elements of power and temporality (Giddens 1979:54 in *ibid.*). In addition, any theorization of institutions is lacking as well. In other words, such theories understand actors as entirely conscious of their motivations and not affected by institutional relations. Functionalism, on the other hand, theorizes structure and organization of social relationships as a descriptive and static pattern based on the notion of function, which undermines the role of the actors. Thus, functionalism, lacks an adequate theory of action, because the notion of function

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<sup>2</sup> Due to the 'lock down' of the Danish society (including universities and libraries) as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, I was not able to borrow Giddens' original book at the library and it is not available online.

understands actors only as willingly fulfilling the need of the structures. Structuralism has a very decisive theory of institution and structures, and they are understood as appearing in different forms as “some kind of underlying determinant of surface appearances” (ibid.). As a result, this deterministic emphasis put on structures gives little or no space for theory of action. Giddens identifies, in his criticism, that one of the weaknesses in the just-mentioned theories, is the inability to sustain a distinction between ‘structure’ and ‘system’, which is important in Giddens’ conception of structuration theory. In addition, he claims, by introducing the notion of temporality into the concept of structure, structuration theory abandons the dualism of statics, as found in functionalism, and dynamics, as found in structuralism. As a result, structuration theory is able to rejoin the theorization of action with the concept of structure.

### Theory of action

An underlying premise for Giddens’ theory, is the acceptance that society is a human product. Consequently, the endless repetition of social practices, which is called ‘social life’, is not determined, but created by conscious actors with lay ‘knowledge’. In Giddens’ theory, the concept of “reflexive consciousness, language and collective lay knowledge” (Dickie-Clark 1984:96) is of utmost importance. It is the preconditions of the ability to socially interact. ‘Lay knowledge’ should be understood as the ‘mutual knowledge’ or “common-sense understandings possessed by actors within shared cultural milieux” (Giddens 1976:88-89 in ibid.). However lay knowledge is defined, it refers to the awareness and ability to reflect, monitor, and modify conduct, competent actors is expected to inherit. Hence, social actors are understood as active and skilled agents.

In Giddens’ theory of action, three elements need to be elaborated on. These elements are the perception of action as continuing practical intervention, the element of power, and the crucial question of the conditions of action. Giddens defines action as “a continuous flow of conduct” (Giddens 1976:75 in Dickie-Clark 1984:97) and a “stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions of corporeal beings in the ongoing process of event in the world” (Giddens 1979:55 in ibid.). Implicit in this definition, action is understood with a practical and voluntarist nature. Thus, actors could have ‘acted differently’ if they would “have seen fit to

do so" (ibid.). This practical and voluntarily dimension of action identifies the autonomy of actors.

In Giddens' theory, 'power' is understood as the "sense of transformative capacity used in active negotiation among actors which is chiefly involved and is concerned with the continuous intervention by actors in events" (Dickie-Clark 1984:97). By perceiving power in this sense, "power involves relations of autonomy and dependence in circumstances where the outcome requires the agency of others" (ibid.). In other words, this kind of power is a part of the concept of agency, and the possibility that actors could have acted differently. Moreover, actors do not only know the 'rules' or follow internalized fixed patterns, but they are capable of actively negotiate the interactions and relationship they produce using the transformative capacity they have. Therefore, social practices are not only slavish repetitions, but contain elements altering the relationships as they are being reproduced. With the perception that, in social interaction of any kind, one part has more power than the other, however, no part has no power at all, means that also subordinates have an effect. Ultimately, all actors have the "ability to intervene and accounts in part for the ever-changing content of social practices and the relationships built upon them" (Dickie-Clark 1984:98). This measure of autonomous power of all actors reinforces the possibility of change.

The third element, the question of the limitation of action, lies in the fact that not all actions may be rationally accounted for. Hence, the introduction of the concept of 'unconscious' sources of action and 'unintended consequences'. Two concepts which is to be understood as limiting conditions for future action. In clarification, actors are only conscious to some extent. Thus, in any social action, there will be knowledge the actors are neither fully conscious nor unconscious about. This is recognized as elements of motivation present in social action which are unavailable to rationalization by the actors. This 'escape' from the rationalized actions recognizes the "link between face-to-face interaction and the repeated, 'deeply sedimented' social practices or institutions" (Dickie-Clark 1984:99).

### Structure vs. system

Giddens makes a definition of social systems as the "reproduced relations between actors or collectivities, organized as regular social practices" (Giddens 1979:66 in Dickie-Clark 1984:101)

or, “Social systems are systems of social interaction: as such they involve the situated activities of human subject, and exist syntagmatically in the flow of time (ibid.)”. Importantly, systems of relations and social practices are defined by the fact that they are situated activities performed by concrete subjects. Consequently, they exist in time and space. ‘Structure’ on the other hand, is defined as a “‘virtual order’ of rules and resources” (Dickie-Clark 1984:101) which are “temporally ‘present’ only in their instantiation, in the constituting moments of social systems (Giddens 1979:128 in ibid.). To clarify this distinction, Giddens uses the example of the differences between language and speech. Where language, as a set of signs and rules for its use, may be understood as a structure, while speech, as concrete acts performed by actors, may be understood as a system. Speech acts exist in space and time and they draw on and instantiate language while they do so. Language only exist in the moments when it is used to constitute speech acts. Except in these moments, language as a structure has no existence. In other words, structures only exist in those moments where social actors draw upon them to produce social practices.

An important distinction Giddens makes, compared to other theoretical frameworks with regards to the notion of structure, is that ‘structure’ does not refer to observation-based constructed models or static description of patterns of relationships (Dickie-Clark 1984:101). Instead, Giddens conceives structure as “the rules and resources used by actors in the production and reproduction of social practices designed to pursue their intentions and interest” (ibid.). This underlines a fundamental part of structuration theory, namely, that social life is understood as a reproduction of practices of active agents. Furthermore, the theory defines structures as made up by ‘rules and resources’. Analytically, rules and resources may be separated into three kinds; “the communication of meanings via interpretative schemes; the exercise of power as transformative capacity; and the evaluative judgement of conduct through norms and sanctions” (Dickie-Clark 1984:102). Noteworthy, in actual social practices, these three kinds intermix. Importantly, ‘rules’ should not be understood as fixed, but instead as being amended continually. Competent social agents inherit “knowledge of structure in all three of its dimensions” (ibid.) and thus, when they draw upon this knowledge, they are using structure to produce their interaction. However, at the same time, it is during this production of time-space existing social acts, that structures are being reproduced. This recognizes the duality of structures.

### Dualism of structures

Giddens' concept of 'duality of structures' refers to the dualism structures constitute as being both the means through which social interaction is produced, as well as being the outcome of that interaction. This can be exemplified in how "social structures are both constituted by human agency, and yet at the same time are the very medium of this constitution" (Giddens 1976:212 in Dickie-Clark 1984:102). In other words, social interaction and practices, are thus both enabled and constrained by structures. Implications of this perception of structures are many. First, it indicates that social life is a result of reproduced social practices 'brought to life' through social interaction of conscious and active actors. Second, structures capture how social actors are constrained by the three kinds of rules and resources (meanings, norms and power) in social practices, but it is also these interweaved elements of structure which allow actors to produce (and transform) social practices. This can better be understood when thinking about how sanctions are both inducements as well as coercion. Third, and perhaps most important with regard to this thesis, the duality of structure "expresses the mutual dependence of structure and agency" (Giddens 1979:69 in *ibid.*). In this notion of structure, lies the greatest importance of the structuration theory. Before discussing this point further, the concept of temporality should be considered, as this also contributes to that point, and furthermore forms an important part of the structuration theory.

### Temporality

Time-space relations are a part of Giddens' theory of action. These relations are important because of how structures only exist through actions which occur in time and space. Additionally, the use of the concept of temporality, is how Giddens brings social interaction and institutionalized practices together. Giddens considers temporality as "integral to social theory" (Giddens 1979:198 in Dickie-Clark 1984:103) and "in order to show the interdependence of action and structure' it is essential 'to grasp the time-space relations inherent in the constitution of all social interaction'" (Dickie-Clark 1984:103). Giddens rejects what himself argues to be a simplistic perception of temporality, namely the perception where time and space is conceived as an 'environment' of social practices. Instead, time-space should be conceived as "the modes in which object and event 'are' or 'happen'" (Giddens 1979:54 in

ibid.) or “the binding and the extension of time-space through structure” (ibid.). To further clarify, following Giddens, time and space relations are constitutive of the social life, and social life is constituted through social interaction and structure. Social life can be understood as a ‘process’, as it is a production and reproduction of interaction and structure. The only way this process can endure, is if it is carried out across differences in time and space. Thus, temporality is the terms of the existence of any structure. In other words, social life (the structure-agency process) has to be sustained and transmitted across the gaps produced by differences in time and space. In that way, Giddens uses temporality to explain how producing (time-space existing social acts) and sustaining (transmitted structures) form a social life that is both binding and extended through space and time, despite how time and space differences might disrupt it. In this way, “time-space enters into the constitution of social practices and is, moreover, manipulated by actors in their relations with one another” (Dickie-Clark 1984:103). Furthermore, temporality is important in Giddens’ sense of structure as it “extends the range of interaction across time and space” (Op.Cit.:104). Ultimately, temporality enables social practices to sustain, which is fundamental for the existence of any structure.

### Structure and agency

Finally, the concepts of agency and structure can be brought together, through Giddens’ concept of the duality of structure. Concerning the link between structure and agency, as the theoretical framework explored above indicates, the theory “integrates the concrete acts of actors with the notion of an ‘absent’ structure of rules and resources which actors draw upon” (ibid.), and they are conceived as both “interlocking and complementary” (ibid.). Structure and action are linked in moments when actors draw upon structure in their production of social practices. Giddens explains;

the duality of structure relates the smallest item of day-to-day behaviour to attributes of far more inclusive social systems: when I utter a grammatical English sentence in a casual conversation, I contribute to the reproduction of the English language as a whole. This is an unintended consequence of my speaking the sentence, but one that is bound in directly to the recursiveness of the duality of structure (Giddens 1979:77-8 in ibid.).

In other words, in social acts, the social actor draws upon structure in the moment of the act. In that way, the structure exists in time and space, thus, the act is partly producing and partly reproducing the structure in the moment of action. Furthermore, Giddens, enabled by the

concept of temporality, defines institutions as a result of the repetition of social practices, and institutions are seen as 'deeply sedimented'. Implicit in the commonness of all interaction, the above outlined concepts of actors' autonomy, temporality, the theory of action, and structure, provide a theoretical framework considering the possibilities and limits for agents to make and remake deeply embedded institutional organizations of society.

### Summing up

The nexus of agency and structure as indicated by the structuration theory, with its essential features outlined above, was shown to be highly relevant for explaining the findings from the internship-based project. For a concrete example to pinpoint how the theoretical framework can be used in examining the findings from the internship-based project, one can look at how the fgm encouraging institutional structures are both produced and reproduced through agency. When a mother performs fgm on her daughter because she is told by her husband that their daughter should be ready for marriage, the husband, mother, and daughter draw upon several deeply sedimented institutional structures. For instance, the ideal of a 'complete woman'. However, in that same time-space existing act (the mutilation), they reproduce those same structures which again limit future action. Additionally, the actors involved are active in (re)producing those structure.

Ultimately, the social practice of fgm is both enabled and constrained by structure. With the theory of structuration, Giddens' reinstatement of people as autonomous, active, and skilled agents, and by showing how structures are both enabling as well as constraining, the perception of human social life as partly open for conscious efforts from those who live it, is gained. Consequently, the possibility to remake the social world exists, if the people who have had a share in making it choose to and have the knowledge that they can do so. With regard to this thesis, structuration theory demonstrates the presence of possibilities for, through agency, change the structures which are encouraging fgm practices to continue. This is greatly interesting in the project posed here. Moreover, this implication is the reasoning behind the posed hypothesis that if the literature on the issue of fgm would incorporate a theoretical framework as the one just-explored, it would affect the understanding on how to eliminate fgm in a positive matter.

Before turning to the literature review and analysis, it should be noted that the structuration theory will not be applied to the data throughout the analysis. The theoretical framework is not, as such, a tool to the qualitative content analysis. Rather, as implied in the problem formulation, the theoretical framework will be applied to assess eventual shortcomings in the literature. Namely, through the exploring of the question of how the current literature on the issue of fgm, with regard to fgm elimination, could benefit from incorporating the theory of structuration. In other words, the theory will not play a role in the upcoming analysis, but be applied as an essential part of the discussion on the findings from the analysis.

## Literature analysis

Despite the scholarly attention to the issue of eliminating fgm, to my knowledge, there are neither a literature review on how the issue of fgm is being theoretically approached by current scholars, nor a theoretical analysis of the just-mentioned literature. The following chapter tries to fill this research gap. Furthermore, it is interesting to examine how current scholars understand the issue of fgm, and moreover, how they explain the continuation of fgm, as well as its elimination. The knowledge produced in academia is shaping particular perspectives, it is thus important to recognize the implications when scholars are addressing a topic in a specific way. Consequently, an analysis of the theoretical approaches to a contentious issue such as fgm, is important. Besides, such an analysis could indicate eventual shortcomings in the current theoretical approaches and imply in what ways a theoretical framework incorporating a focus on structure and agency could possibly widen their scope. Ultimately, an analysis of this character would answer the posed hypothesis and thus, be integral to answering the presented problem formulation.

The aim of this literature review is to investigate; (i) current theoretical approaches to fgm, (ii) understandings of fgm, (iii) the reasons for the continuing of fgm, (iv) challenges in the elimination of fgm, and (v) the strategies suggested to overcome such challenges, all in regard to the current literature. The five issues just mentioned are the initial key concepts used in the construction of the structured literature search. These five key concepts were also used to construct the overview template (Figure 2) used to perform the literature review and analysis. Additionally, those same five concepts will be used to structure the forthcoming literature analysis chapter.

Recalling the methodological considerations regarding how the literature review in this project is simultaneously the qualitative content analysis, the forthcoming chapter will be referred to as a the 'literature analysis', constituted through the literature being reviewed and analyzed simultaneously. Recalling the elaboration on the literature search, 82 articles were reduced to 70 relevant and accessible articles subjected to the qualitative content analysis. The forthcoming chapter will review and analyze the literature according to the overview template (Figure 2) and the chapter will be structured accordingly. First, an introduction will

provide some overall observations in the literature. The analysis will then be organized as followed; the *Themes and Sub-themes* part will explore the four identified themes in order, followed by the *Categories and Sub-categories* part exploring the four categories in order. The analysis chapter will include figures and tables as a means to both ease the reading, as well as to better illustrate the structure of a somehow complex analytic framework. Each part of the analysis will be accompanied by an illustration of the current analysis level from the overview template (Figure 2), where the relevant part is outlined in red. The findings from the forthcoming analysis will be elaborated on when we proceed to the discussion chapter where the theoretical framework of structuration theory will be applied to the findings.

### Overall observations

The 70 articles were reviewed and analyzed according to the overview template illustrated in Figure 2. The four different themes emerged as different theoretical approaches to fgm identified during the literature review. All the articles were able to be categorized into one of these themes. However, the themes are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and it can be argued that some of the articles may fit into more than one of the themes or fall in-between two. Nevertheless, as a part of the analysis process, systematizing the articles is necessary. As a result, the specific categorization of the articles is based on what is interpreted by the researcher as being the main focus of the article. The same complication is relevant in the systematizing of the articles with regard to the four different categories and the sub-categories. The definitions of the different themes, sub-themes, categories and sub-categories will be elaborated on in turn alongside the analysis.

The literature consists of articles from scholars from different geographical, cultural and research discipline areas. For example, the literature includes scholars from within fields such as social welfare, family law, politics, reproductive health, feminist theology, transcultural nursing, immigrant & refugee studies, and various other fields of research. In addition, the literature includes scholars from a list of different countries, including, but not exclusive to; Australia, Egypt, Finland, Italy, Kenya, Nigeria, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, the U.K., and the US. This combined will provide a comprehensive and inclusive analysis of an international, intercultural and interdisciplinary character. However, critics may argue that the level of inclusiveness is threatened as the main part of the articles reviewed stems from

western<sup>3</sup> scholars. Furthermore, some of those scholars contributed with more than one article in the body of literature; Bergom Lunde (& others 2014, & others 2020), Dustin (2010, Dustin & Phillips 2008), Gruenbaum (2005, 2006), Johnsdotter (2012, Essén & Johnsdotter 2010, Palm, Essén & Johnsdotter 2019), and Wade (2009, 2011, 2012). This may reflect an enhancement of their 'western' perspectives. Additionally, this research, as many other international and intercultural studies, suffers from the weakness inherent by language barriers. Only including English articles may result in the lack of perspectives from non-English speaking scholars. Thus, in this case, the perspectives raised by voices from within fgm practicing communities may lack. However, noteworthy, the findings from the analysis show that there is not a 'mainstream western perspective' in the retrieved scholarly literature on the issue of fgm. Scholars have different perspectives regardless of their commonality in geographical, cultural or research area. Additionally, although outnumbered, the literature also articulates a voice from within fgm practicing communities. I would thus argue, that the analysis is inclusive to the degree possible in a project limited by language barriers.

#### Definition of fgm

An interesting observation during the review was that a great majority of the articles used the definition of fgm set out by the World Health Organization (WHO). Regardless of the theoretical approach or understanding of fgm, the definition of fgm as "partial or total removal of external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons" (WHO 2020) posed by the WHO, is used in some variation in almost every article. In addition, the WHO's classification of fgm into four major types (ibid.), was frequently posed in the literature. Interestingly, the definition and classification from the WHO were stated both by scholars who support this definition and classification, as well as by those scholars who clearly question and/or criticize it. For instance, in an article within the theme of 'rationale', where the main focus of the article is to explore the meanings, beliefs and practices of fgm among Nigerian tribes in the US and Nigeria (Anuforo, Oyedele & Pacquiao 2004), the definition and classification is stated for explanatory reasons, but then criticized for not being clear enough. More specifically, the classification is criticized for not capturing how "the actual procedure carried out depends on the sharpness of the instrument used, the degree of

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<sup>3</sup> The definition of the 'west' is context depending. However, in this case, the 'west' include; Europe, North America & Australasia.

struggling by the child, and the skill as well as eyesight of the operator” (Op.Cit.:104). Similarly, several others criticize how the definition and classification is too simplistic when the practice, and the experiences of it, in reality is much more diverse than the definition and classification implies.

Similar critiques are made in a fair amount of the literature. The definition of fgm is mainly questioned by those who explore the rationale of the practices, as well as by those who question the framework of the issue of fgm. By example, several articles raise the question regarding the understanding of ‘non-medical reasons’ in the definition. It is questioned (in several articles and with different arguments) because of how the ‘non-medical’ emphasis is what draws the line between illegal fgm, and legal male circumcision and female genital cosmetic surgeries. For instance, Dustin (2010), among others, argues that cosmetic surgeries, such as labia reduction and ‘trimming’, are not necessarily as different as the often too easily adopted definition of fgm suggest. Because “like FGM/C, these [cosmetic genital surgeries] are therapeutically unnecessary surgeries carried out with the intention of making women fit a cultural norm” (Dustin 2010:12). Thus, she questions whether cosmetic female genital surgeries can be fully argued to be done for ‘medical reasons’, and hence, not clash with the definition of fgm set out by the WHO. Dustin (2010) argues furthermore, that this perception of the supposed difference in the genital alterations, which the definition is implying, may result in discrimination between the autonomy of non-western women wanting fgm based on custom, and the autonomy of western women wanting similar procedures based on ‘medical reasons’.

Comparable, Pardy, Rogers and Seuffert (2020) argue the definition may lead to discriminating legislation regarding female genital modification. They argue that the law on fgm in Australia is a conversion of “white law saving brown girls from brown women (who are acting on behalf of Islam and brown Islamic men)” (Op.cit.:276). As a result, the law is obscuring the women’s place as law-bearers, and moreover, implying there is a difference of autonomy between women undergoing cosmetic genital surgeries and women undergoing genital modifications based on tradition or religion. The same critique is voiced by, among others, Johnsdotter and Essén (2010) in their exploration of the political and cultural sphere of female bodily modifications. They argue that different discourses, which are “infused with cultural meanings

and value” (op.cit.:30) have “given rise to politically-based decisions to advocate, accept or criminalize certain genital modifications, including through surgical procedures” (ibid.). By somehow comparing how both fgm and genital cosmetic surgery are reasoned by societal views of the relationship between sex, gender and genitals, they question whether cosmetic genital surgeries are much different from fgm, as the definition by the WHO suggests.

Many of the articles focusing on discourse, raise concerns about the differences in discourses on fgm and male circumcision. Some of them do so with regard to the definition of fgm from the WHO, as this definition is also used to legitimize male circumcision based on a perception that male circumcision is ‘medically reasoned’. Despite a mainstream perception of critical differences in the procedures, consequences and meanings between fgm and male circumcision, several scholars question this perception and its implications. For instance, Perez (& others) (2014) question why the WHO and the UN approaches fgm and male circumcision in two very different ways. Moreover, arguing that male circumcision is proposed and medicalized, only focusing on the health benefits, while fgm is condemned and only focusing on the health risks. Perez (& others) (2014) argue that this is confusing and may be hindering the elimination of fgm because of the difficulties to differentiate between the two practices without inconsistencies and double standards.

Furthermore, Bell (2005) explores the discourses of genital cutting and western discourses on sexuality, and questions why fgm is being easily condemned, while male genital cutting is perceived with indifference. This critique is shared by several other scholars who raise similar concerns. Noteworthy, several of these scholars are from various western contexts where male circumcision is common. For instance, prevalence of male circumcision in the US among men over the age of 15, is estimated to be 75% (WHO 2007:8), although the numbers are in a decline among new generations (NCHS 2015). Darby and Svoboda (2008) are among those who argue that as long as the inconsistency in perception and discourse on male and female circumcision exist, the discourse of legitimate male circumcision will pose a considerable challenge in the elimination of the illegitimate fgm. Ultimately, the above elaboration on the definition of fgm has shown that even though all the literature used in the analysis is identified to concern the same issue, namely that of fgm, the perceptions and arguments varies greatly, even as basically, as regarding the definition of the issue at hand.

### Use of terminology

Whereas the definition of fgm, posed by the WHO, was present in the majority of the literature reviewed, the typology used to describe these procedures varied. Some of the used typology were fgm, fgm/c, fgc, female circumcision, or female genital modifications or -altering. Many, but not all, stated the recognition and awareness of the implications inherit by the specific typology used. Some overall tendencies were noticed. For instance, articles within a human right framework tend to use the typology of fgm, to underline the breach of human rights, which is consistent with other research (UNFPA 2019). Articles with a more cultural relativistic approach, tend to use a more neutral typology, referring to the procedures as either female genital cutting, circumcision or alteration. Similarly, the articles critical to the western discourse of condemning the practice of fgm, also questioned the typology used in the discourse, and naturally, were aware of their own use of typology on the issue, and thus used more neutral wordings such as female genital cutting or circumcision.

### Themes and Sub-themes

As a part of the process of structuring the literature review and analysis, some pre-created categories were applied, such as the key concepts from the structured search. However, during the reviewing and analyzing of the literature, I allowed different themes, sub-themes and sub-categories, which expressed the latent content in the various articles, to emerge from the data. I identified four different main themes, which could easily also be called 'frames', 'approaches', or 'theoretical frameworks'. However, to avoid confusion with the theme called 'framework', the typology 'theme' is preferred. Recalling the overview template (Figure 2) the forthcoming four sub-chapters will analyze the four different themes in order.

Themes Theoretical approaches identified during the analysis			
Rationale	Framework	Consequences	Prevalence

Second layer of Figure 2. Illustrating where in the analysis we are now

At least one of the themes occurred in all of the articles. Moreover, although more difficult in some of the articles than others, it was possible to identify which one of the themes was given more focus than the others, resulting in a categorization of all the articles into the four

different themes. The pie chart below (Figure 3) shows the quantitative distribution of the 70 articles. Each of the four themes will be elaborated on in turn with regard to the distribution of data, a short definition of the theme and its criteria, and overall typical notions within the theme exemplified with reference to specific articles. Finally, I include some notes on eventual articles or notions that stand out from the main ideas presented under each theme, so as to present the variety in the literature.

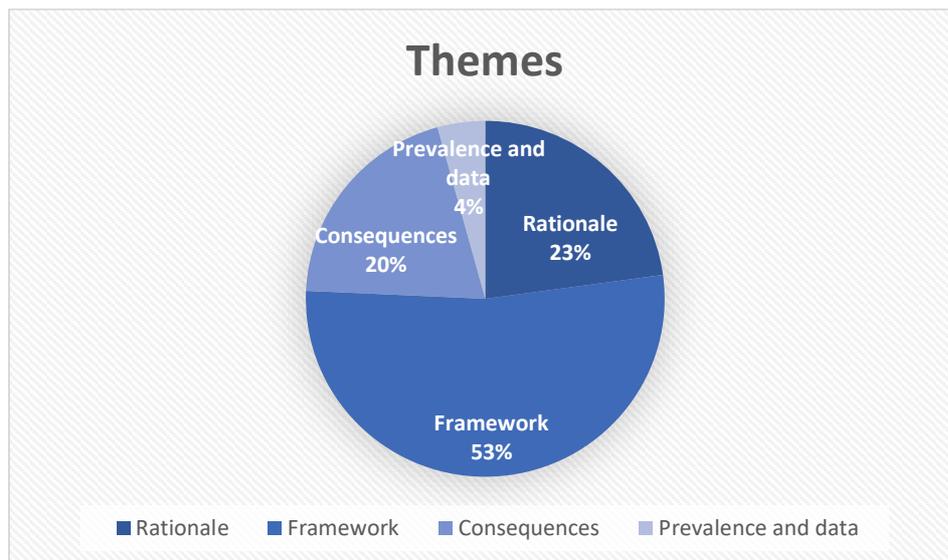


Figure 3. Illustrates how the total of 70 articles are divided in various themes

### Rationale

The theme of 'rationale' was the theme with the second highest prevalence in the literature with its 16 articles, which make up for 23% (Figure 3). The theme emerges primarily through a focus on the practice of fgm as such. Through descriptions of the practices and examinations of the practices' grounds, the articles within this theme, are identified to primarily focus on understanding and the rationalization of fgm. The overall criteria and definition of the theme includes a main focus on the rationale of fgm. However, the theme could also be named 'explanation', 'philosophy', 'rationalization' or something fourth. Moreover, the theme includes articles that focus on explanations of the procedures, the cultural and social significance of the practices, meanings, beliefs, reasons, and its roots. In addition, the theme includes articles that focus on how people perceive the practices and different attitudes towards the practice. Some overall tendencies were noticed during the analysis. For instance, the articles focusing on the practices as such, exploring its socio- and cultural significance, tended to either use a cultural relativist theoretical framework, a human right theoretical

framework, a theological framework, or qualitative exploring people’s perceptions of the practice. The distribution of the articles within the different sub-themes is illustrated in the table below (Table 1).

Rationale	Authors
Culture: 9 articles	Ali & Strøm (2012), Anuforo, Oyedele & Pacquiao (2004), Baron & Demark (2006), Gruenbaum (2005), Gruenbaum (2006), Kinyanjui (2002), Owojuyigbe (2017), Renshaw (2006), Van Bavel, Coene & Leye (2017)
Human rights: 3 articles	Akintunde (2010), Khalil (2006), Monahan (2007)
Theology: 2 articles	Abdulla (2018), Rouzi (2013)
Perceptions: 2 articles	Bergom Lunde & Sagbakken (2014), Small & Sharma (& others) (2019)

Table 1. Table of the data distribution within the theme ‘rationale’

By using a cultural relativist framework Baron and Demark (2006) are arguing for the importance of understanding and exploring the cultural significance of the practice in light of the sociopolitical climate in the its cultural context. Similarly, Renshaw (2006), Anuforo, Oyedele & Pacquiao (2004), Gruenbaum (2005), Kinyanjui (2002), and Van Bavel, Coene & Leye (2017) are all, in their different ways, exploring the cultural context, meanings, beliefs and the role of the practices in traditional African societies. For instance, Van Bavel, Coene and Leye (2017) use a mixed methods empirical case study, to examine the shift of the practice of fgm and the shift in meanings of the practices in Maasai societies in Tanzania. Moreover, arguing that fgm has changed from a traditional rite of passage into womanhood, to a secretive practice done to younger girls. Thus, fgm is no longer a rite of passage into womanhood, resulting in both a practical- and meaning shift in the practice. While some other scholars (Gruenbaum 2006, Owojuyigbe 2017) focus more on the cultural significance of fgm with regard to the issue of sexuality.

Other scholars (Table 1) use a human right theoretical framework to contextualize the practice as a human right breach and a violence against women. For instance, Khalil (2006) argues that the practice of fgm is perceived as an abuse of the girl child, but that the traditional practice is closely connected to other cultural norms within a community. Resulting in a clash with the international human rights due to how, in some contexts, what is considered a ‘norm’ may be considered abuse in other contexts. Ultimately, Khalil (2006) argues that it is unacceptable to

criticize any social group for the practice of fgm, without providing constructive alternatives (Op.cit.:22). Alike, Monahan (2007) argues that ideas surrounding “community norms and righteous behavior” (op.cit.:27) in fgm practicing communities, dooms the approach of “enforcement through the use of Principles 2 and 9 of the DRC (Declaration of the Rights of the Child)” (ibid.) to fail. By explaining how in these contexts, parents do not see fgm as harmful and they may even feel that their daughter will not be ‘normal’ or socially accepted if she is not cut. Thus, in their context, they are not “fulfilling their role as good parents” (ibid.) if they do not have fgm performed on their daughters. Consequently, the human right approach may encounter inconsistencies and challenges in eliminating fgm. Furthermore, two articles (Small, Sharma & others 2019, Lunde & Sagbakken 2014) explore how people, respectively, male and female students in Sierre Leone, and different groups of society in Somaliland, perceive the practice of fgm, its rationale, and its elimination. Two other articles explore the issue of fgm in relationship with religion (Table 1). A mainstream perception is that fgm is closely connected to Islam. However, Rouzi (2013) explains how the alleged relationship between fgm and Islam is a misunderstanding as a result of misinterpretation of the Qu’ran and one specific Hadith.

### Framework

The theme of ‘framework’ was the theme with the highest prevalence in the literature with 37 articles, which make up for more than half of the literature (53%) (Figure 3). The theme emerges through three different sub-themes. However, all the articles within the theme have in common a focus on the framing of, or approach to, the issue of fgm. The three sub-themes are identified to be; ‘criminalization’, ‘discourses’, and how the issue of fgm is being ‘addressed’. Two articles were unable to be categorized into one of those sub-themes. One of them was an article commenting on a tour to a UNICEF supported program on fgm elimination in Egypt (Mollerman & Franse 2009). The other article explores young men’s role in the elimination or continuation of fgm in Kenya (Brown, Mwangi-Powell, Jerotich & le May 2016). The distribution of the articles within the sub-themes is illustrated in the table below (Table 2) and the sub-themes will be shortly elaborated on in turn with regards to the criteria of the sub-theme and overall notions within the literature.

Framework	Authors
Criminalization: 10 articles	Ako & Akweongo (2009), Berer (2015), Christou & Fowles (2015), Gaffney-Rhys (2019), Gill & Van Engeland (2014), Guiné & Fuentes (2007), Jefferson (2015), Ljeoma & Nkiru (2008), Odeku, Rembe & Anwo (2009), Pardy, Rogers & Seuffert (2020)
Discourse: 14 articles	Bell (2005), Bergom Lunde & Hauge (& others) (2020), Darby & Svoboda (2008), Dustin (2010), Johnsdotter (2012), Johnsdotter & Essén (2010), Njambi (2004), Paakkanen (2019), Perez (& others) (2014), Shweder (2013), Sobel (2015), Wade (2009), Wade (2011), Wade (2012)
Addressed: 11 articles	Abdulcadir, Rodriguez & Say (2014), Bedri & Bradley (2017), Dustin & Phillips (2008), Hughes (2018), Khaja & Barkdull (& others) (2009), Latham (2016), Manderson (2007), Ogunsiji, Wilkes & Jackson (2007), Palm, Essén & Johnsdotter (2019), Shell-Duncan (2008), Wilson (2012)
Other: 2 articles	Brown, Mwangi-Powell, Jerotich & le May (2016), Mollerman & Franse (2009)

Table 2. Table of the data distribution within the theme 'framework'

The sub-theme of 'criminalization' includes articles focusing on the criminalization of fgm practices as such, either in specific countries, internationally, or in general, as well as articles exploring specific laws and policies with regard to fgm. For instance, the legislation and policies on fgm implemented in the UK, was the topic of six different articles. Some of the articles focus on the tension between cultural relativism and universal human right, pointing to a tension between issues of multiculturalism, anti-immigration agendas, and stereotypes of culture. Others explore the effect of the legislation, and several question if criminalization is the most effective intervention to eliminate fgm. For instance, Jefferson (2015) argues that the criminal law alone is an inadequate mechanism for fgm eradication. Similar arguments are found repeatedly in the literature which focus on criminalization in general. A noteworthy notion is the argument that the laws against fgm in the UK and Australia (Pardy, Rogers & Seuffert 2020) are on the edge of being discriminatory and should thus be put under more scrutiny. Other scholars focus on the consequences of legislation on fgm within fgm practicing countries. For instance, Ako and Akweongo (2009) explore the limited effectiveness of fgm criminalization in Ghana. Moreover, criticizing how the issue of fgm has been framed as a legal problem, and thus has been criminalized instead of battled with other, perhaps more effective, interventions. Similarly, Berer (2015) argues for the limitations of criminalization

with regard to stop fgm, but however, argues that “nonetheless, legislation can challenge the traditional status quo by providing legitimacy to new behaviours” (Op.cit.:147).

The sub-theme ‘discourse’ includes articles focusing on the different discourses regarding the issue of fgm. Both in regard to sexuality, male circumcision, cosmetic surgeries, policies, literature and media. All of the articles regarding discourses bring up the western discourse on fgm and either questions or/and criticize it. For instance, Paakkanen (2019) argues that the different discourses on male and female genital cutting, and genital cosmetic surgeries are a result of gendered biases, and moreover, “reflect and enforces deeply rooted and culturally biased gender issues” (op.cit.:1495). Furthermore, Johnsdotter (2012) connects the history of female circumcision in Africa and in the west and argues that the discourse in the literature on fgm in Africa reflects western ideas and perspectives through history. Wade (2009, 2012) explores the discourse of fgm with regard to how the issue is portrayed as an uncontested issue in US newspapers. Moreover, she argues how some speakers in US newspapers use fgm to define women in modern societies as liberated, and to both uphold and challenge the gendered modernity/tradition binary. Wade furthermore argues that other speakers use the issue of fgm to denigrate non-western culture, as well as trivialize the oppression that U.S. women typically encounter. Alike, Sobel (2015) examines how the issue of fgm is portrayed in the mass media in Gambia, Kenya and Ghana in addition to the U.S., arguing that the media coverage is minimal and is seemingly not impacted by the increase of international initiatives to combat the issue.

Interestingly, Njambi (2004) uses her perception of her own circumcision to highlight the entanglements of body and culture, to argue that the anti-fgm discourse has “perpetuated a colonialist assumption by universalizing a particular western image of a ‘normal’ body and sexuality in its quest to liberate women and girls” (op.cit.:281). Similarly, several other scholars articulate a ‘western discourse’ criticism. These scholars argue that the discourse on fgm is portraying the African as barbaric and primitive, African women as victims, brainwashed, with no autonomy, and in the need of ‘saving’ from the west. Hence, several articles raise the question whether the international discourse on eliminating fgm is free from hegemonic, imperialist values or ideology from the west, as any other colonial intervention.

The sub-theme of how the issue is addressed includes articles exploring how immigrant women with fgm are being perceived, helped and counselled in western countries. Several scholars argue that immigrant women with fgm face re-victimization and oppression by professionals due to uninformed or culturally insensitive health care professionals. Other articles use case studies to examine how the issue of fgm has been approached in fgm practicing communities, exploring the best strategies for elimination. For instance, Latham (2016) explores how fgm was abandoned in one generation in a community in Iran, Wilson (2012) explores how the abandonment of the Chinese traditional foot-binding can be compared to the elimination of fgm, while Huges (2018) explores the effect of the socio-religious-political intervention of the strategy of ARP (alternative rites of passage) in Kenya.

### Consequences

The theme of ‘consequences’ was the theme with the third highest prevalence in the literature with 14 articles, making up for 20% of the literature (Figure 3). Within the theme, three sub-themes emerged, which all the articles could be sorted into (Table 3).

Consequences	Authors
Medical: 4 articles	Epstein, Graham & Rimsza (2001), Khaled & Cox (2000), Payne & others (2019), Veila, Argo (& others) (2015)
Sexual: 4 articles	Andersson (& others) (2012), Catania (& others) (2007), Fahmy, El-Mouelhy & Ragab (2010), Obermeyer (2005)
Mental: 6 articles	Ahmed & others (2017), Im, Swan & Heaton (2019), Omigbodun, Bella-Awusah (& others) (2020), Parikh, Saruchera & Liao (2018), Piroozi (& others) (2019), Vloeberghs, van der Kwaak, Knipscheer & van den Muijsenbergh (2012)

Table 3. Table of the data distribution within the theme ‘consequences’

The sub-theme ‘medical’ consequences include mostly articles focusing on general health consequences, risks, and implications for women living with fgm. The focus on sexual consequences focus, naturally, on the different sexual consequences for women with fgm, as well as for their sexual partners. For instance, Fahmy, El-Mouelhy and Ragab (2010), explore the sexual consequences of fgm for both women and men in two rural communities in Egypt, while Catania (& others) (2007) explore the limitations and possibilities for orgasm for women with fgm living in Italy, and Andersson (& others) (2012) examine general sexual quality for

women with fgm living in the UK. The articles focusing on mental consequences include examining the relationship between fgm and psychiatric problems among adolescent girls in Egypt, arguing that there is a higher prevalence of mental problems among girls with fgm (Ahmed & others 2017). Similar examinations are done in other articles, examining the psychological effects of fgm among women living in the Netherlands, the UK and Iran. Interestingly, and standing out, Obermeyer (2005) uses a systematic literature review on health and sexual consequences of fgm, to argue that the evidence of the consequences is poor, inconclusive, and not sufficient, to support the hypothesis that circumcision destroys sexual function or precludes enjoyment of sexual relations.

### Prevalence

The theme of ‘prevalence’ was the least prevalent theme in the literature, with only 3 articles, constituting 4% of the literature (Figure 3). Two articles focus on the prevalence of fgm (Table 4). One of them examines the change in prevalence of fgm among ever-married 15-19 years old women from year 2005-2014 in Egypt. The other article examines the decline in number of women subjected to fgm in a region in Ethiopia during the last 30 years. Arguing that both educational level and women empowerment are two influencing factors resulting in negative attitudes against the practice of fgm, resulting in women are more likely not to cut their daughters. One article focuses on data availability, arguing that even though the issue of fgm has gained attention, data are lacking, strategies to retrieve data are limited, and the issue of data availability is not given the needed attention.

Prevalence	Authors
Prevalence: 2 articles	Alkhalaileh, Hayford, Norris & Gallo (2017), Rahnlenbeck & Mekommen (2009)
Data availability: 1 article	Cappa, Van Baelen & Leye (2019)

Table 4. Table of the data distribution within the theme ‘prevalence’

### Categories and Sub-categories

We have now arrived at the third layer of the analysis according to the overview template (Figure 2). All the 70 articles were identified to address category number 1, namely, the ‘understanding of fgm’. However, not all the articles address all of the three other categories. Some address three out of four, others only two out of four, and some articles only address

the first category. The forthcoming four sub-chapters will analyze each of the four categories, with their respective three to four sub-categories. The sub-chapters will include the data distribution, a short definition and criteria of the category and sub-categories, overall typical notions, as well as some notes on eventual unexpected articles or notions.

<u>Categories</u> The structured literature search' four key concepts			
1. Understanding of fgm	2. Reasons for continuation	3. Challenges in elimination	4. Strategies to elimination

<u>Sub-categories</u> Emerged during the analysis			
1a. Tradition 1b. Social norm 1c. Health issue 1d. Human right issue	2a. Societal framework 2b. Perceptions of 'positive' effects 2c. Poor interventions	3a. Institutionalized 3b. Un-effective interventions 3c. Cultural sensitivity 3d. Incoherence	4a. Better understanding and awareness 4b. Education 4c. Address the issue differently

Third and fourth layer of Figure 2. Illustrating the part of analysis, we now will turn to

### Understanding of fgm

<u>Categories</u> The structured literature search' four key concepts			
<b>1. Understanding of fgm</b>	2. Reasons for continuation	3. Challenges in elimination	4. Strategies to elimination

Third layer of Figure 2. Illustrates where in the analysis we are now

'Understanding of fgm' is the first category and it has four sub-categories which emerged during the literature review. The quantitative distribution of the data is illustrated in the figure below (Figure 4). Fundamental for all the articles included in the analysis, is that the articles address the issue of fgm. Naturally, the articles entail an understanding of fgm and it is interesting to examine these understandings. The different understandings of fgm emerge either through a focus on how fgm is a tradition, how the practice is a social norm, how the practice is a health issue, or how fgm is an issue of human rights. Some of the articles may entail notions of more than one of the sub-categories, but all the articles could be categorized according to giving more attention or emphasis to one of the four various understandings.

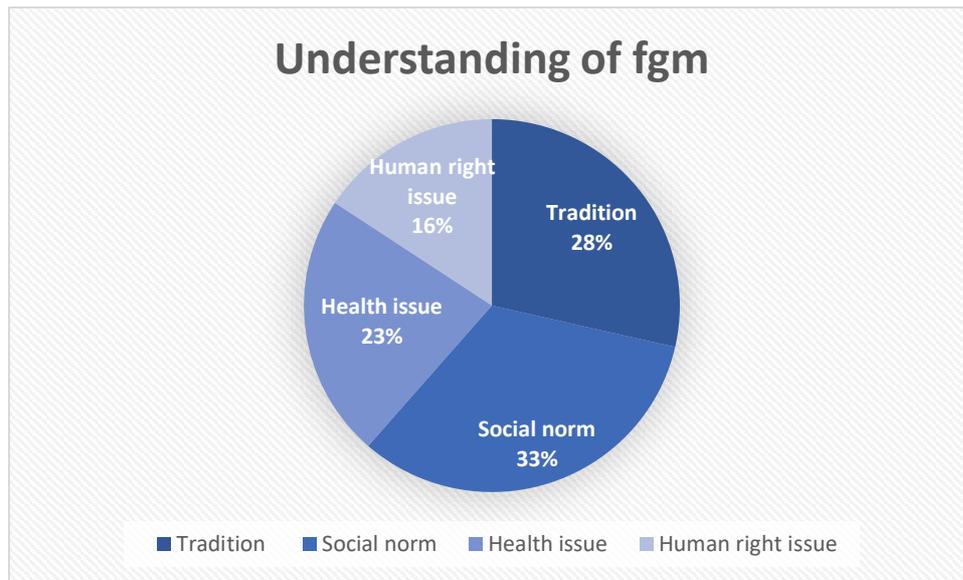


Figure 4. Illustrates the distribution of the data according to the four identified sub-categories within the category of 'understanding of fgm'

### Tradition

The understanding of fgm as a tradition makes up for 28% of the literature and it is the main understanding in 20 different articles (Figure 4). The criteria for an article to be interpreted as understanding fgm as mainly a tradition, is either based on the fact that nothing else is stated than that the practice is considered a tradition. Or, fgm is perhaps put in connection to the other sub-categories of understandings, but the other sub-categories are not given any relevance or emphasis. Two of the articles (Table 5) does not state anything regarding the practice, beyond what is stated in the explanatory definition of the practice in the article (often the definition from the WHO). Thus, the articles lack statements which could be used to interpret their understanding of fgm. Additionally, three articles (Table 5) are identified to be more or less 'objective' and take no standpoint regarding the understanding of fgm. For example, Sobel (2015) provides a content analysis which shows that the news coverage dominantly frames fgm as an issue related to culture, but that is not necessarily Sobel's own perception of the practice.

The other articles in this sub-category (Table 5) state that the practices are either a cultural, religious, or historical tradition, practice or operation, or a mixture of them. According to Renshaw (2006), fgm is a historically and culturally embedded tradition, while Akintunde (2010) argues it to be a history-long cruel tradition and operation. Others, like Abdulla (2018),

argues that the practice is not only cultural, but also religious. Moreover, Bedri and Bradley (2017), among others, do not see it only as a tradition, but as a harmful tradition, arguing that “FGM is an unspeakable brutal example of what humans are capable of” (op.cit.:31). Noteworthy, even though articles are identified to understand fgm as a tradition, it may be argued that some of the articles within this sub-category draw lines to broader contexts, such as social norms, health or right issues. For instance, Baron and Denmark (2006) see the practices mainly as a historical, cultural and religious tradition (Op.cit.:339), but furthermore, in simplicity and shortness, see fgm in connection to the ideological structure of practicing communities (op.cit.:346), without neither examining nor arguing for this connection any further.

Tradition	Authors
Nothing is stated: 2 articles	Bergom Lunde & Hauge (& others) (2020), Wade (2012)
Objective: 3 articles	Johnsdotter (2012), Perez (& others) (2014), Sobel (2015)
Traditional: 15 articles	Abdulla (2018), Akintunde (2010), Ako & Akweongo (2009), Ali & Strøm (2012), Baron & Denmark (2006), Bedri & Bradley (2017), Gill & van Engeland (2014), Khaja, Barkdull (& others) (2009), Kinyanjui (2002), Latham (2016), Njambi (2004), Rahnlenbeck & Mekonnen (2009), Renshaw (2006), Rouzi (2013), Shweder (2013)

Table 5. Table of the data distribution within the sub-category ‘tradition’

### Social norm

The understanding of fgm practices as being a social norm is identified in 23 articles, making up for 33% of the literature (Figure 4). In common for all the articles within the sub-category of social norm, is that they see the practice of fgm in connection to a broader context. The articles may define the practices as a tradition, practice or similar, but they explore and stress how fgm is a norm within the practicing societies, and is thus, interconnected with other norms. 10 of the articles see it as a cultural and social norm, a categorization which emerges through connections between fgm practices and issues of social and economic status, ideological meanings and values, as well as other factors within a social context where fgm is being practiced so women fit the cultural norm. For instance, Van Bavel, Coene and Leye (2017) see fgm as a “self-enforcing norm that ensures that individuals continue the practice” (op.cit.:1345), and furthermore, sanctions those who try to deviate from it (op.cit.:1354).

Five articles (Table 6) focus mainly on how fgm is connected to social norms regarding sexuality and marriage. Several explore how norms and perceptions of marriageability demands fgm to continue in some contexts. For instance, Epstein, Graham and Rimsza (2001) define fgm as a cultural tradition, but argue that the tradition is closely connected to being equipped for marriage, which in fgm practicing societies is crucial in securing an economic and social future for women. Similarly, Omigbodun, Bella-Awusah (& others) (2020) argue that fgm is a non-negotiable rite of passage, as it improves the social value and marriageability of women by ensuring purity, protection and virginity before marriage. In addition to being connected to cultural ideals of purity, Gruenbaum (2006) argues that fgm is connected to a cultural ideal of beauty, by exploring how “Sudanese women praise the smooth, clean character of the idealized infibulated vulva” (op.cit.:125).

Six articles (Table 6) may, or may not, see fgm in connection to marriageability and cultural ideals, but expand the ‘social norm’ understanding of fgm to one that incorporates perceptions of power and gendered oppression. In example, Cappa, Van Baelen and Leye (2019) understand fgm as “means to control women’s sexuality” (Op.cit.:1139). Manderson (2007) sees it as a norm that is a part of a “patriarchal society that associates female chastity with an enclosed vulva” (op.cit.:294). While Christou and Fowles (2015) understand fgm as “a function of power structures within practicing communities. So-called ‘cultural practices’ like FGM are part of a system which ensures the powerful, within a practicing community, remain powerful” (op.cit.:345).

Social norm	Authors
Culture & society: 10 articles	Alkhalailah, Hayford, Norris & Gallo (2017), Berer (2015), Bergom Lunde & Sagbakken (2014), Dustin (2010), Gruenbaum (2005), Huges (2018), Im, Swan & Heaton (2019), Johnsdotter & Essén (2010), Khalil (2006), Van Bavel, Coene & Leye (2017)
Sexuality & marriage: 7 articles	Bell (2005), Brown, Mwangi-Powell, Jerotich & le May (2016), Epstein, Graham & Rimsza (2001), Fahmy, El-Mouelhy & Ragab (2010), Gruenbaum (2006), Monahan (2007), Omigbodun, Bella-Awusah (& others) (2020)
Gender oppression: 6 articles	Cappa, Van Baelen & Leye. (2019), Christou, Fowles (2015), Manderson (2007), Pardy, Rogers & Seuffert (2020), Wade (2009), Wade (2011)

Table 6. Table of the data distribution within the sub-category ‘social norm’

### Health issue

The understanding of fgm practices as being mainly a health issue is identified in 16 articles, constituting 23% of the literature (Figure 4). The sub-category of understanding fgm as mainly a health issue emerges either through the fact that the articles do not explicitly state anything to be interpreted as an understanding of fgm, but the the article is identified within the sub-theme health consequences of fgm. The health issue understanding emerges also through statements of how the issue of fgm is mainly considered a health issue. The articles identified as having a 'health issue' understanding of fgm may define the practice as a tradition, but expands this understanding by putting emphasis on how the tradition is connected to a broader health context. For instance, Ahmed (& others) (2017) define fgm as a cultural tradition, but focus mainly on how the tradition of fgm is a procedure, which needs to be eliminated due to negative health consequences. Similarly, Khaled and Cox (2000) see it as a medical health problem, arguing that "awareness by the medical profession is the first step in addressing the issue" (op.cit.:165). Furthermore, both Piroozi (& others) (2019) and Anuforo, Oyedele & Pacquiao (2004) argue how the procedures of fgm should be understood as a global health issue and challenge, based on the negative effects of the practice.

The health issue understanding emerges also through articles which understand fgm as mainly an issue affecting women's sexual quality. Lastly, six articles are identified as having the main understanding of fgm as a health issue, but do not explicitly state so. However, all of them are identified within the theme of 'consequences' (Table 3). Moreover, as the articles do not state anything which could be interpreted as understanding fgm according to any of the other sub-categories, it seems appropriate to classify them as understanding fgm as a health issue.

Health issue	Authors
Medical procedure: 7 articles	Ahmed (& others) (2017), Anuforo, Oyedele & Pacquiao (2004), Khaled & Cox (2000), Ogunsiyi, Wilkes & Jackson (2007), Parikh, Saruchera & Liao (2018), Piroozi (& others) (2019), Vloeberghs, van der Kwaak, Knipscheer & van den Muijsenbergh (2012)
Sexual health: 2 articles	Andersson (& others) (2012), Catania (& others) (2007)
Not stated: 6 articles	Abdulcadir, Rodriguez & Say (2014), Obermeyer (2005), Palm, Essén & Johnsdotter (2019), Payne (& others) (2019), Small, Sharma (& others) (2019), Veila, Argo (& others) (2015)

Table 7. Table of data distribution within the sub-category 'health issue'

### Human right issue

The understanding of fgm practices as being mainly an issue of human rights is identified in 11 articles, which make up for only 16% of the literature, and is thus being the understanding with lowest prevalence in the literature (Figure 4). The articles categorized as understanding fgm mainly as a human right issue, often incorporate the other understandings as well. However, they expand on those understandings, by arguing that even though it may be, for instance, a health issue, it is more importantly an issue of human rights violation. The understanding of fgm as a human right issue emerges through either a focus on how the practices are illegal and a criminal offence, a violation of human rights more generally, or as a manifestation of gender inequality. There are some fundamental differences between these foci. For instance, the articles classified as understanding it as a 'criminal offence', tend to focus mainly on the practice as breaching specific legislation. In comparison, the articles exploring how the practice is a violation of human rights, do not focus specifically on how it breaches legislation, but how it is a manifestation of different human rights violations in general.

Moreover, some articles (Table 8) expand on the human right understanding, and see it in another context, namely as being connected to gender inequality. For instance, Owojuyigbe (2017) argues that fgm is a part of upkeeping the patriarchal system, and practices such as fgm, is a manifestation of the patriarchal system of gender inequality. Similarly, Gaffney-Rhys (2019) claims that "fgm reflects the entrenched inequalities that exist between men and women" (op.cit.:5). Moreover, Wilson (2012) has a holistic understanding, putting emphasis

on how fgm is both a tradition, a social norm as well as a health and right issue. However, the most emphasis is put on how the practice is a gender-based violence, and should be eliminated based on human rights and the pain of the women who undergo it.

Human right issue	Authors
Criminal offence: 3 articles	Guiné & Fuentes (2007), Jefferson (2015), Ljeoma & Nkiru (2008)
Violation of human rights: 3 articles	Mollerman & Franse (2009), Paakkanen (2019), Shell-Duncan (2008)
Gender inequality: 5 articles	Dustin & Phillips (2008), Gaffney-Rhys (2019), Odeku, Rembe & Anwo (2009), Owojuyigbe (2017), Wilson (2012)

Table 8. Table of the data distribution within the sub-category 'human right issue'

### Reasons for continuation

Categories			
The structured literature search' four key concepts			
1. Understanding of fgm	<b>2. Reasons for continuation</b>	3. Challenges in elimination	4. Strategies to elimination

The third layer of Figure 2. Illustrates where in the analyses we are now

The category 'reasons for continuation' could not be identified in all the articles, because some of the articles did not express, describe or indicate anything regarding the continuation of fgm. Thus, it could not be determined or interpreted what perception of the reasons for the continuation of fgm the articles entail. The category captures the various explanations for the continuation of fgm in the literature, including descriptions and explanations for both initial reasons for why fgm is being practiced per se, as well as why it is still being practiced despite various interventions and measures to prevent it from continuing. For instance, some of the articles within this category explore why people continue to practice fgm, even though they are aware of the negative health effects of the procedures. During the study of the literature within this category, three different sub-categories emerged (Figure 5). These three sub-categories will be explored in order, including a short definition, its overall notions, as well as those notions that stand out. Notably, bear in mind that the unit of analysis in this category is not the whole body of literature (the 70 articles), but the 38 articles identified to entail relevance to the current category.

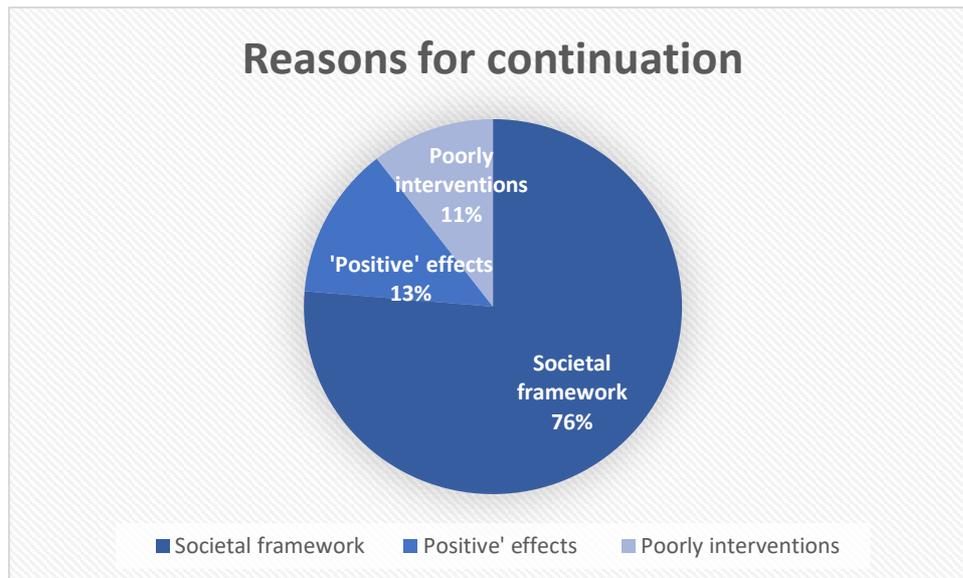


Figure 5. Illustrates the distribution of the data according to the three identified sub-categories within the category 'reasons for continuation'

#### Societal framework

The sub-category 'societal framework' might as well be called 'structural reasons', 'socio-cultural reasons', or similarly. Nevertheless, the sub-category emerges through a reasoning closely related to how a broader context encourage fgm to continue. 29 out of the 38 articles are identified within this sub-category, making up for the largest part of this category (Figure 5). These articles include explanations for the continuation of fgm based on that the practice is deeply cultural, religious, or socio-economic and structurally embedded in the practicing communities. Moreover, this sub-category entails ideas of sexuality and notions of how fgm is connected to social status and marriageability. These articles can furthermore be categorized into three different main foci or explanations (Table 9). They are not mutually exclusive, and some of the articles may be argued to fit into several of these three foci. For instance, there is a fine line between explaining the continuation of fgm as a result of strong cultural or religious norms in a society, and explaining it as a result of the same norms understood as a structure. Thus, the three main foci are overlapping, and the categorization is somehow more difficult and influenced by the researchers reasoning in this sub-chapter. This is not necessarily a weakness of the categorizations, but rather, an underlining of the complexity of the literature.

The articles identified as explaining the continuation of fgm based on how the practice is culturally embedded, emerge through the perception that the tradition of fgm is so deeply embedded in the culture in the practicing societies, that it encourages the practice to continue. This includes not only ideas of culture and custom, but also ideas of how the practice may be religiously 'demanded'. For instance, Berer (2015) sees fgm as a social and cultural issue, and questions if the criminalization of fgm in Britain has any positive impact on the minds of fgm practicing communities, arguing that, "in fact, vilifying and punishing immigrant parents who already live on the margins of society only pushes them further away from mainstream society, making them cling to their own cultures and traditions more tightly" (Op.cit.:155). Suggesting that the practice is an important part of people's deeply embedded cultural identity and feeling of belonging.

Bergom Lunde and Sagbakken (2014) reach the conclusion, in their studies on people's perceptions of fgm and its elimination in Somaliland, that the participants believe it is culturally and religiously demanded by them to continue the practice. As a result, they do so regardless of their awareness of the negative health consequences. Similarly, Omigbodun, Bella-Awusah (& others) (2020) explore how people in Nigeria perceive fgm as a good practice, and moreover, conclude that the tradition, even though in transition, is still important for many to follow. Similarly, Kinyanjui (2002) explores the rationale of fgm in Kenya and claims that "supporters of traditional culture have various justification to explain this practice. They claim that as a rite of passage for the child, it is a sign of maturity, the advance from childhood to adulthood and therefore to responsible parenthood" (Op.cit.:73). Moreover, argues that the family is caught between the viewpoint of upholding the practice "for social, cultural and economic reasons" (op.cit.:74), and the viewpoint of the dangers of the practice (ibid.). Furthermore, Renshaw (2006) claims that "cultural customs are very deeply embedded in beliefs and emotions. They also carry political component because those whose income depends on the practice will resist its cessation" (Op.cit.:285).

Interestingly, Veila, Argo (& others) (2015) include various factors in their explanation of the continuation of fgm, such as "preservation of ethnic and gender identity, femininity, female purity/virginity, and 'family honor'; other reasons are maintenance of cleanliness and health and assurance of women's marriage ability." (Op.cit.:152). However, they do not put these

factors in a broader connection (a structure) but label the practice as a “rite of passage to womanhood, with strong ancestral and sociocultural roots” (ibid.). However, arguing that the importance of the practice lies in the social approval given to the circumcised, and thus, fgm is a tool of social control (ibid.). Ultimately, the article includes somehow all three foci, but none of the foci are given more attention than the others, and thus, the article is somehow difficult to categorize.

The focus on how the continuation of fgm is because of structural factors in the practicing communities, emerges through a wider understanding of the ‘culturally embedded’ focus, to involve an understanding of how the strength of the societal framework encourages the practice to continue. For instance, Paakkanen (2019) claims that all genital cutting are a result of aesthetic, cultural, religious reasons and pressure, and moreover, poses questions regarding the free will. The articles identified to have this structural focus, include connecting the various cultural factors in a way which consider it to be something similar to a ‘structure’. For instance, Van Bavel, Coene and Leye (2017) expand the understanding of how fgm is deeply embedded in the culture, connecting it to include structural reasons for continuation. They explain how both women and men feel “powerlessness as individuals to go against the pressure of cultural norms” (op.cit.:1355) with regard to stop practicing fgm. Similarly, Gaffney-Rhys (2019) explains the continuation of fgm as a result of how “oppressive social context can subvert people’s autonomy by imparting detrimental desires, values and goals” (op.cit.:7). Furthermore, Gruenbaum (2005) argues that fgm is a part of a dynamic culture, thus being both able and unable for change because of how “families considering abandoning circumcision often find the risk to high: jeopardizing their daughter’s future social wellbeing and economic security” (Op.cit.:437), are factors in play in “decision-making for reform or abandonment” (ibid.).

The focus on sexuality and marriageability emerges through explaining the continuation of fgm mainly based on ideas of marriageability, sexuality and gender roles. For instance, Khalil (2006) explores how the fact that men in fgm practicing communities still insist on marrying circumcised girls, results in women encouraging their daughters to be circumcised “on the pretext that it would enhance the child’s prospect in attracting the right husband” (Op.cit.:16). Similarly, Anuforo, Oyedele and Pacquiao (2004) see fgm as “a rite of passage to womanhood

that improves the social value of a woman for marriage. Uncircumcised females are more likely unable to get married, because they are not considered full-fledged women” (op.cit.:108). Moreover, Dustin (2010) sees the continuation of fgm based on different reasons as well as perceptions of normality and beauty. Furthermore, recognizes that fgm is “only one of the many culturally specific ways in which women’s bodily and sexual integrity is abused, sometimes with their own participation” (op.cit.:19). Similarly, Christou and Fowles (2015) connect both perceptions of normality and women’s oppression in how fgm is a “necessary part of womanhood according to their cultural beliefs. It is often linked to conceptions of proper sexual behaviour, preserving a girl’s virginity for marriage and controlling a woman’s libido” (op.cit.:346) and that “in reality FGM is based on a patriarchal social power structure in which a woman must conform to an extreme interpretation of ‘ideal femininity’ in order to be accepted by the wider community” (op.cit.:346).

Similarly, Manderson (2007) explores how the contextual concepts of sexuality, agency, and the perceptions of a ‘natural’ body, are reasons for the continuation of fgm. Furthermore, these concepts are put in connection to the patriarchal upkeep of the current perception of sexual pleasure for the man. Alike, Owojuyigbe (2017) claims the socio-cultural motivations and the patriarchy are the reasons for the continuation, because of the fact that the practice is done to please the man sexually, be fit for marriage and to keep virginity.

Social framework	Authors
Culturally embedded: 10 articles	Ahmed, Magdy (& others) (2017), Bedri & Bradley (2017), Berer (2015), Bergom Lunde & Sagbakken (2014), Kinyanjui (2002), Ogunsiji, Wilkes & Jackson (2007), Omigbodun, Bella-Awusah (& others) (2020), Renshaw (2006), Sobel (2015), Veila, Argo (& others) (2015)
Structural: 12 articles	Alkhalileh, Hayford, Norris & Gallo (2017), Baron & Denmark (2006), Brown, Mwangi-Powell, Jerotich & le May (2016), Gaffney-Rhys (2019), Gruenbaum (2005), Hughes (2018), Im, Swan & Heaton (2019), Khaled & Cox (2000), Latham (2016), Pakkanen (2019), Van Bavel, Coene & Leye (2017), Wilson (2012)
Sexuality & marriage: 7 articles	Anuforo, Oyedele & Pacquiao (2004), Christou & Fowles (2015), Dustin (2010), Khalil (2006), Manderson (2007), Mollerman & Franse (2009), Owojuyigbe (2017)

Table 9. Table of the data distribution within the sub-category of ‘social framework’

### Perceptions of positive effects

The five articles identified within this sub-category all entail various kinds of positive effects, and thus they are not any further categorized (Table 10). The focus on how people's perceptions of positive effects of fgm are the reasons for the continuation of fgm emerges through beliefs about various positive medical, mythical, sexual, and social effects of fgm. For instance, Ako and Akweongo (2009) see fgm as continued based on how the practicing communities see it as "a form of showing how brave a woman is and also maintaining a cultural practice which is viewed as good" (Op.cit.:51), a perceptions which creates conflicting views when the practice is criminalized and portrayed as dehumanizing by the state (ibid.).

One of Gruenbaum (2006) findings in her qualitative study in Sudan, was that "both men and women understood that infibulation played an important role in male sexual pleasure, a belief that encouraged its continuation in the communities" (op.cit.:127). Greater sexual pleasure for men is also considered one of the many positive effect of fgm in Small and Sharma's (& others) (2019) article examining attitudes toward fgm among students in Sierra Leone. Moreover, Akintunde (2010) writes a one-page long explanation of all the different beliefs of good reasons for fgm and the various risks the practice prevents among Nigerian fgm practitioners and victims (op.cit.:200). These include 'medical' reasons such as preventing vaginal cancer, enhancing fertility, making delivery easier and preventing pregnancy complications. Mythical beliefs such as "uncircumcised women harbour evil spirits" (ibid.) and "if the head of a baby boy touches the clitoris, it will die; If an uncircumcised mother delivers a baby girl, she will die" (ibid.). Furthermore, social reasons such as how fgm "helps to curb promiscuity" (ibid.), "to preserve family honour" (ibid.). In addition, sexual reasons such as how uncircumcised women are considered nymphomaniacs, sexually loose, and unable to be disciplined, are some of the perceptions and beliefs of the positive effects of fgm, which encourage people to continue the practice.

Interestingly, Ali and Strøm (2012) explore how fgm is perceived as the means to escape different diseases, which fgm is believed to cure. They explore the phenomena of 'lawalawa' in Tanzania, to explain a challenge of eliminating fgm. Lawalawa is a term "used to describe certain vaginal and urinary tract infections, appeared soon after 1968, following the ban on

FGM in the Arusha Declaration, and is still used today” (op.cit.:69). People’s beliefs regarding fever or other symptoms of the lawalawa disease, causes them to circumcise girls. They believe that lawalawa is only cured through circumcision or else the girl-child will die from the disease. This results in contrasting beliefs, because no-one wants their daughter to die from lawalwa. As a result, “all the little girls with lawalawa are being circumcised, and they are being cut over and over again, and then they finally bleed to death” (op.cit.:72).

Positive effects	Authors
Various kinds of perceptions of positive effects: 5 articles	Akintunde (2010), Ako & Akweongo (2009), Ali & Strøm (2012), Gruenbaum (2006), Small, Sharma (& others) (2019)

Table 10. Table of the data within the sub-category ‘positive effects’

### Poor interventions

Initially, this sub-category was named ‘poor implementation of legislation’, but was re-named ‘poor intervention’, as a means to also capture those articles including foci on other poorly implemented interventions, with regard to explaining the continuation of fgm. The explanation for continuation of fgm based on poor interventions includes thus both the perception of poor realization of legislation, as well as how campaigns, in addition to criminalization, have brought unfortunate consequences. For instance, Monahan (2007) argues that the criminalization has brought unfortunate consequences, such as the practice becoming secretive and people will not seek help. Additionally, another reason of continuation, is the result of a backlash to what may be perceived as cultural imperialism when outsiders intervene in eradicating the practice.

Moreover, Shell-Duncan (2008) argues that health education campaigns have failed to motivate large-scale behavior change due to the fact that fgm practicing communities might know the risks of fgm, but the risks are worth taking in light of the social and cultural importance of the practice (op.cit.:226). Furthermore, these campaigns have perhaps exaggerated the risks, which have undermined the credibility of the campaigns. Odeku, Rembe and Anwo (2009) claim that the reasons for continuation is the poor realization of the international human rights. Interestingly, Gill and Van Engeland (2014) claim that the results of the criminalization of fgm are not adequately researched, claiming that the implementation of the legislation has not resulted in much change in the continuation of fgm.

Poor interventions	Authors
Legislation and campaigns: 4 articles	Gill & Van Engeland (2014), Monahan (2007), Odeku, Rembe and Anwo (2009), Shell-Duncan (2008)

Table 11. Table of the data within the sub-category of ‘poor interventions’

Challenges in elimination

<u>Categories</u> The structured literature search' four key concepts			
1. Understanding of fgm	2. Reasons for continuation	<b>3. Challenges in elimination</b>	4. Strategies to elimination

The third layer of Figure 2. Illustrates where in the analyses we are now

The sub-category ‘challenges of elimination’ is the third category, and it emerges through various explanations and perceptions about what the main challenges in the elimination of fgm are. Such explanations were identified in 34 articles. During the study, the sub-category could furthermore be categorized into four different main foci or explanations. These main explanations regarding the challenges in the elimination of fgm identified in the literature were; how the practice is institutionalized, how the current interventions are un-effective, cultural sensitivity to the issue, and lastly, that there is an in-coherence between legislation or interventions and the public opinion in fgm practicing communities. All the 34 articles could be classified as having one of these four main explanations, and the quantitative distribution of the data is illustrated in the figure below (Figure 6). However, some of the articles mention more than one of the explanations, but the articles are categorized according to what is considered being given more attention or emphasis regarding what the main challenge in the elimination of fgm is.

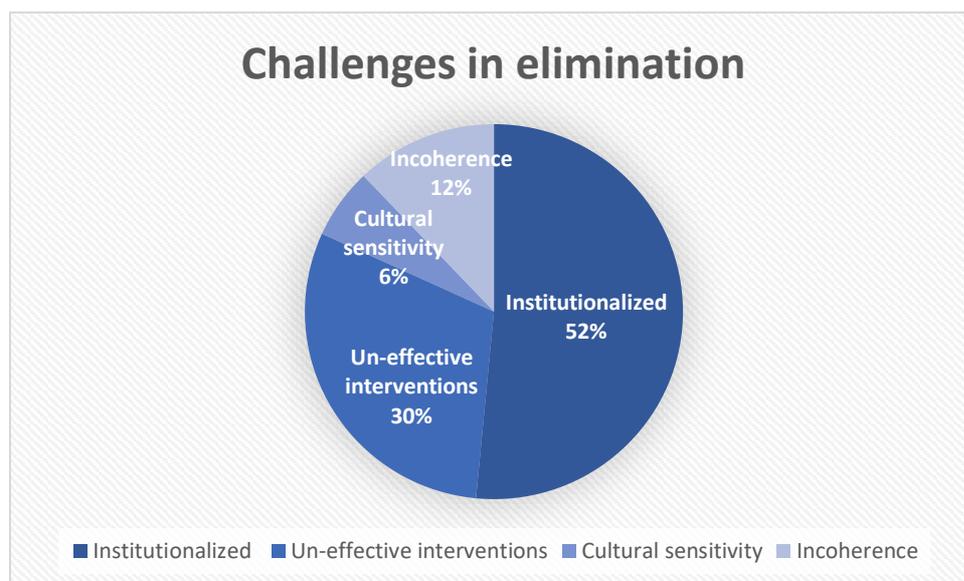


Figure 6. Illustrates the distribution of the data according to the four identified sub-categories within the category of 'challenges of elimination'

#### Institutionalized

The most prevalent explanation of challenges in eliminating fgm is grounded in how the practice is institutionalized. This explanation was identified in 17 articles and make up for half of the literature (Figure 6). Similar to the main focus of 'social framework' within the sub-category 'reasons for continuation', the 'institutionalized' focus, focus on how the practice is deeply embedded in the practicing communities. It could be argued that these two sub-chapters are two sides of the same coin, but that is not necessarily the case. Some of the same articles are found within both classifications, but that is not current for all. Some articles explain the reasons for continuation of fgm based on a social framework, but does not explain the challenge of elimination based on the same reasons. For instance, Ogunsiji, Wilkes and Jackson (2007) are earlier identified to explain the reasons for continuation of fgm based on how the practice is culturally embedded, but they explain the challenge in elimination based on un-effective interventions. The same goes for other articles as well, underlining the differences between the two sub-categories of 'reasons for continuation' and 'challenges in elimination'. Thus, this focus is called 'institutionalized' to avoid confusion, even though it might as well be called 'societal framework' which would also capture the essence of the three different main explanations (Table. 12) within this sub-category.

The explanation of how the main challenge in eliminating fgm is because the practice is institutionalized, includes explanations of how the practice is a part of a structure. Either a patriarchal structure, a cultural structure, or connected to beliefs and ideas of gender roles in the practicing communities. The focus called 'structural' emerges through explanations such as Baron and Denmark's (2006) explanation of how fgm "is an institutionalized form of violence against women, that is accepted by the government and seen by the community as a cultural obligation" (op.cit.:353), or Dustin's (2010) claims of how the practice is an institutionalized women abusive harmful practice.

Moreover, Van Bavel, Coene and Leye (2017) explain a challenge to eliminate fgm is the strength of cultural norms, which enforces sanctions on those who deviate from them (op.cit.:1354). This cultural structure is affecting several spheres of individuals' lives, such as how men cannot marry an uncut wife, and even if they want to, the family will still cut the girl. They furthermore argue that Maasai society is known for being culturally conservative, and a challenge in eliminating the practice is their resistance to outsiders changing their culture, and practices as fgm, which reflect Maasai identity. Similar structural claims can be seen in Akintunde's (2010) claim that "the fact remains that FGM is an attempt by the society in the name of culture to suppress womanhood and to perpetuate women's submissiveness to men. It is a construction by men to satisfy their selfish ends" (op.cit.:203). Similarly, Christou and Fowles (2015) claim that fgm is an extreme manifestation of the patriarchal power structure and that there "are powerful motivations encouraging parents to consent [to fgm]" (op.cit.:347). Moreover, they explain that fgm is integral to the power dynamics in the communities and this power is circular, "it only exists as long as parents continue to consent when it is time for their daughters to be cut" (ibid.). Interestingly, Hughes (2018) sees one of the challenges in eliminating fgm based on how the practice is institutionalized in the communities and thus, it will not be eliminated through the strategies used to date (Op.cit.:276).

Some see the institutionalization of fgm within the practicing communities as a result of the strength of culture. For instance, Gaffney-Rhys (2019) explains how the deeply embedded practice in the societies results in people being in favor of the practice. Moreover, contrasts in rights such as "group rights, the right of self-determination, the right to private and family

life, the right to autonomy and the right of parents to make decision for their children” (op.cit.:20) challenge the elimination of fgm. Similarly, Anuforo, Oyedele and Pacquiao (2004) see the main challenge to eliminate the practice is how the practice is traditional, “valued with strong social and cultural support among many Nigerians” (Op.cit.:111), and thus, the practice continue “despite efforts by many organizations and countries” (ibid.).

In comparison to the articles focusing on the structural institutionalization of fgm in the practicing communities, some articles see this institutionalization in connection to specific perceptions of gender and sexuality. For instance, Fahmy, El-Mouelhy and Ragab (2010) explain how men are more concerned about the ‘too demanding’ sexual desire of an uncut women, than, how the women’s sexual pleasure is reduced after fgm. The first concern outweighs the latter and thus, the practice is difficult to eliminate because of this perception of sexuality and gender. Similarly, Owojuyibge (2017) claims that the patriarchal beliefs and values defining sex and sexual satisfaction by male satisfaction only (op.cit.:82), and women’s inferior position in the ‘system’, results in women practicing fgm to meet the needs of the man. Moreover, the women will practice fgm to be accepted for marriage, which will secure them a place in the ‘system’. Alike, Manderson (2017) explains how the elimination of fgm is challenged by structural gender beliefs exemplified through how “women seek re-infibulation only in part for the social protection it provides them in a patriarchal society that associates female chastity with an enclosed vulva” (op.cit.:294). Similar gender beliefs are identified in Gruenbaum’s (2006) explanations of how, even though people learn about the dangers of fgm, many people have problems imagining the vagina as being left open. Gruenbaum (2005) moreover, questions the importance of genitalia for sexuality, and argues that a part of the structure in these societies is that “security, a husband’s love, a stable marriage, and socially approved child-bearing” are valued more than the loss of sexual orgasm or other negative effects of fgm.

Institutionalized	Authors
Structural: 8 articles	Akintunde (2010), Baron & Denmark (2006), Christou & Fowles (2015), Dustin (2010), Hughes (2018), Small, Sharma (& others) (2019), Sobel (2015), Van Bavel, Coene & Leye (2017)
Cultural: 3 articles	Ahmed (&others) (2017), Anuforo, Oyedele & Pacquiao (2004), Gaffney-Rhys (2019)
Gender beliefs: 6 articles	Fahmy, El-Mouelhy &Ragab (2010), Gruenbaum (2005), Gruenbaum (2006), Im, Swan & Heaton (2019), Manderson (2007), Owojuyigbe (2017)

Table 12. Table of the data within the sub-category ‘institutionalized’

### Un-effective interventions

Ten articles were identified to claim the challenge of eliminating fgm is because of un-effective interventions. This focus emerges through either explanation regarding the un-effective criminalization of fgm, the lack of consistency in addressing the issue of fgm, or a lack of coherence between the interventions and the cultural framework of practicing communities. For instance, Alkhalaileh, Hayford, Norris and Gallo (2017) claim that both the societal framework and the medicalization of fgm challenge the elimination of fgm. However, their main focus is how the poor implementation of legislation is both reason for the continuation and the main challenge of elimination, because of how the legislation is not feasible by “expecting individuals to enforce the law by reporting on perpetrators” (op.cit.:181). Similarly, Ali and Strøm (2012) explain how the criminalization of fgm in Tanzania led to the establishment of the phenomena of lawalawa, a phenomenon which furthermore has strengthened the practice of fgm. Thus, the criminalization was un-effective as it led to a backlash in the elimination of fgm.

Other articles see the main challenge in the elimination of fgm to be due to a lack of understanding of the practice or including the perceptions of fgm practicing communities in the interventions. For instance, Shell-Duncan (2008) argues that the lack of consolidation between the human right framework and understanding the fgm cultural framework, has led to different approaches to the issue. Moreover, the approaches tend to contradict each other, and therefore they are not effective in actually eliminating the practice. Similarly, Khalil (2006) argues that the lack of a “close collaboration and cooperation, respect for cultural beliefs, and

persistent health education programs within those social groups” (op.cit.:16) challenge the elimination. Similar suggestions can be found in explanations of how, by not including views of fgm practicing communities in the interventions, has challenged the effectiveness of the specific interventions. For example, Latham (2016) argues that ideally “structural interventions be delivered in conjunction with education” (op.cit.:117), but goes on to say that some of the current interventions are un-effective because of how the interventions are designed by “agencies horrified by FGC” (ibid.) and design interventions “without consulting with or looking at why particular communities practiced it” (ibid.). Bedri and Bradley (2017) come with similar concerns, arguing that the different discourses in the elimination have had little or no effect on the elimination or changing the minds of those communities who are practicing it.

One article stands out and provides a different and interesting explanation of a challenge in the elimination of fgm. Namely, Bergom Lunde and Sagbakken (2014) explore how, in Somaliland, reconstruction of the conception of fgm has resulted in people abandoning infibulation (type 3 fgm) but started to medicalize the practice and rather doing the Sunna (type 1 fgm) instead. They explain that this is as a result of the elimination campaign based on the health issues of fgm. By not being aware of the linguistic implications of using the term ‘fgm’ in the campaign, fgm practicing communities perceived the campaign and the advocated health risks of the procedures, as being current only for infibulation. As a result, people thought the campaign advocated for the elimination of infibulation, while other types of fgm were proposed instead. However, this was not the initial intention of the elimination campaign.

Un-effective interventions	Authors
Criminalization: 3 articles	Ali & Strøm (2012), Alkhalaileh, Hayford, Norris & Gallo (2017), Ogunsiji, Wilkes & Jackson (2007)
Culturally inappropriate: 7 articles	Bedri & Bradley (2017), Bergom Lunde & Sagbakken (2014), Khalil (2006), Latham (2016), Monahan (2007), Shell-Duncan (2008), Wilson (2012)

Table 13. Table of the data within the sub-category ‘un-effective interventions’

### Cultural sensitivity

Two articles were identified to explain the challenge in eliminating fgm as being cultural sensitivity. For instance, Dustin and Phillips (2008) argue that multiculturalist demands and considerations have allowed violations of women’s human rights to continue, based on how “we have to be sensitive and not criticize other cultures’ but in doing that they [the government] are allowing violations of women’s human rights to continue” (op.cit.:408). Moreover, Rouzi (2013) claims that the two main challenges to eliminate fgm is the misunderstanding of legitimization of fgm through Islam, as well as cultural sensitivity which can “validate continuation of the practice on a religious basis in countries where cultural and religious identified are thought to be synonymous” (op.cit.:12).

Cultural sensitivity	Authors
Cultural sensitivity: 2 articles	Dustin & Phillips (2008), Rouzi (2013)

Table 14. Table of the data within the sub-category ‘cultural sensitivity’

### Incoherence

The explanation of how a challenge to eliminate fgm is a lack of coherence between legislation and the public opinion, is identified as the main challenge in four articles (Table 11). This focus emerges through explanations of how the elimination of fgm will not be successful as long as there is an incoherence between the interventions, such as the laws, and people’s minds and opinions. For instance, Gill and Van Engeland (2014) explore how addressing multiculturalism in France and Britain have complicated the legislation on fgm, and moreover, that people from fgm practicing communities have an ideology where kin-ship and community considerations will always precede national laws. Ako and Akweongo (2009) see the lack of education and social measures combined with the criminalization of the practice in Ghana, as a challenge in the elimination, because of how public opinion on the positive effect of fgm and the ideology of community rights, prevail over state law. Moreover, Odeku, Rembe and Anwo (2009) claim that the criminalization may even backlash, if there is not a public opinion agreeing to the laws.

<b>Incoherence</b>	<b>Authors</b>
Incoherence: 4 articles	Ako & Akweongo (2009), Berer (2015), Gill & Van Engeland (2014), Odeku, Rembe & Anwo (2009)

Table 15. Table of the data within the sub-category of 'incoherence'

### Strategies to elimination

<u>Categories</u> The structured literature search' four key concepts			
1. Understanding of fgm	2. Reasons for continuation	3. Challenges in elimination	<b>4. Strategies to eliminate</b>

The third layer of Figure 2. Illustrates where in the analyses we are now.

We have now arrived at the last category of the literature analysis. The category of 'strategies to elimination' is identified to be relevant in 43 articles and the distribution of the category into different sub-categories is illustrated in the figure below (Figure 7). During the study, three sub-categories were identified, all capturing the various suggestions regarding strategies used in the elimination of fgm. Strategies should be understood not only as theoretical strategies as such, but also interventions used in the elimination. This category includes both notions on how to improve already used strategies, suggestions for new strategies, as well as critical notions on how the issue of fgm is addressed currently, stressing the need to not only improve the used strategies, but address the issues completely different.

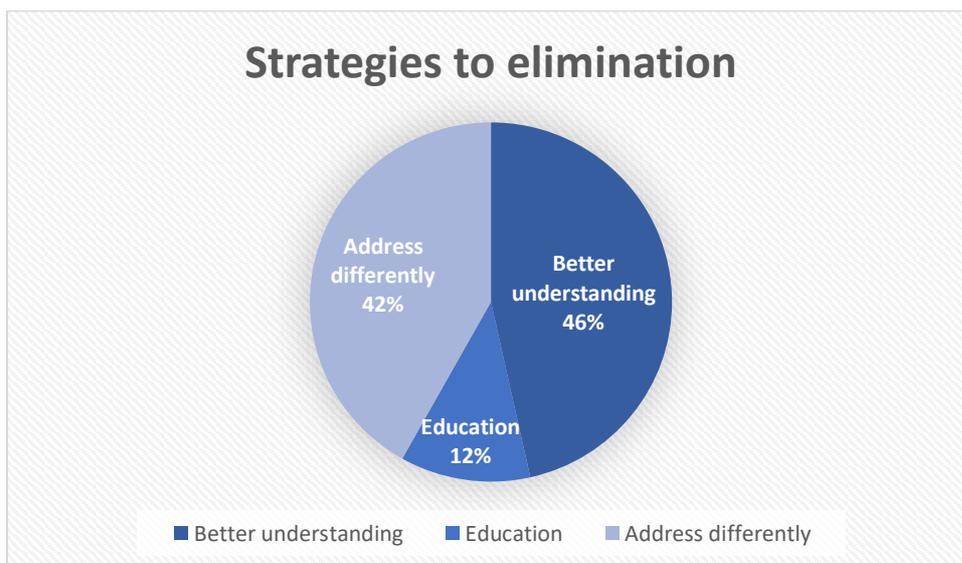


Figure 7. Illustrates the distribution of the data according to the three identified sub-categories within the category of 'strategies to elimination'

### Better understanding and awareness when intervening

The perception that what is needed is a better understanding, emerges through notions that the current way interventions are created and implemented lacks understanding and awareness. 20 articles are identified to entail such notions, making up for 46% of the literature relevant to the category of 'strategies to elimination' (Figure 7). The main focus of better understanding and awareness when intervening, is identified either through the perception that what is needed is a more culturally aware way of intervening, a more culturally aware discourse, a change of the perceptions of fgm when intervening, or, through a perception that what is needed is a more community based approach when intervening. All with regard to the most effective way to eliminate fgm. Two of the articles cannot necessarily be classified within the three just-mentioned main foci. One of them is Ogunsiji, Wilkes and Jackson (2007) who state the need to improve the health offer and possibilities for immigrant women with fgm to get help and support, arguing that criminalization only brings negative consequences, whereas "specialized care should be readily available and marketed" (op.cit.:28). Thus, their article does not provide strategies for elimination as such. The other article, Ali and Strøm (2012) argue that the way forward to eliminate fgm is to accept lawalawa as a disease, and recall how lawalawa came to exist in the 1970s, "to unearth the truth about lawalawa" (op.cit.:74) to break the connection between lawalawa and fgm. The latter article, could, to some degree, be classified as having a 'cultural awareness' focus. However, the strategy presented is too context-specific, to be considered along with the other articles within that focus, which all have a broader focus and suggest strategies for elimination of fgm in general.

Baron and Denmark (2006) argue for a need to deepen the awareness of the sociocultural dynamics within the practicing groups, to inform the educational components of eradication programs. Additionally, they advise to be careful not to 'westernize', but intervene to protect women and children from a physically and mentally destructive practice by focusing on the "women who are responsible for the intergenerational transmission of the practice" (op.cit.:352). Gruenbaum (2005) suggests that one strategy could be to use cultural values in the elimination,

for example, although love of one's daughters lead to cutting them in an effort to ensure their virginity and marriageability, that same value can be utilized to give meaning to alternative practice introduced in planned change, such as protecting their health (op.cit.:431).

One of Manderson's (2007) findings from a qualitative study on immigrant women with fgm living in Australia, suggests that the framework and discourse of fgm is counterproductive because of the lack of cultural awareness and understanding. What is needed instead, is both better understanding as well as to "allow community women to take up the roles of education and advocacy, providing those women within affected communities privacy and dignity" (op.cit.:301). Moreover, Anuforo, Oyedele and Pacquiao (2004) claim that "cultural preservation of dominant values of patriarchal and tribal closeness need to be respected. Any program for change must integrate the established social hierarchy" (op.cit.:111). Suggesting that, if the socio-cultural context of the fgm practicing communities is not incorporated into the understanding and awareness when intervening, the strategies will not be effective. Furthermore, Veila, Argo (& others) (2015) argue that the fgm practicing communities may not have the same human rights priorities as outside interventionists, and thus, if this perception is not included in the intervention, the intervention will not be effective in eliminating the practice.

Four articles are identified to focus on the need to be more aware in the discourse and perception of the practices of fgm when intervening. For instance, the perception of fgm in the practicing communities, as Bergom Lunde and Sagbakken's (2014) paper "argue that people's perceptions of FGC need to be considered in order to understand the practice and its possible abandonment" (op.cit.:175). In addition, the perception of the people behind interventions or people encountering women living with fgm should be considered. In example, Parikh, Saruchera and Liao (2018) argue that there is a need to consider how the issue of fgm is framed in debates about fgm. They challenge the dominant western discourse, with regard to working with women living with fgm, because of how "dominant western narratives of fgm play a key role in shaping women's interpretations of the effects of FGC and contribute to a sense of body shame" (op.cit.:11). Moreover, they claim that "the rhetoric of abuse, damage and victimhood will have a psychological impact on women who have undergone the procedure" (ibid.) and thus, there is a need for better understanding and awareness. Bedri and Bradley (2017) argue interestingly, that the discourse around fgm, which

are shaping the elimination interventions, need to improve because “there is a real danger that, unless coherence across of stands can be maintained, the programme will become disconnected from the very individuals whose mindsets need to be shifted but also from those who represent the powerful vehicle for change needed” (op.cit.:36).

Six of the articles claim that what is needed is the use of a community approach, understood as both incorporating perceptions and beliefs of the communities in the designing of strategies, as well including the communities in the specific interventions. Many of these articles claim that the change will best rise from within the practicing societies, and not imposed upon them. Mollerman and Franse (2009) are among those who claim that a community approach is best. For instance, by creating awareness and dialogue on fgm combined with other issues such as hygiene, education, human rights and parental education, arguing that “this long-term community dialogue is time consuming but is it the only way to create a growing social movement that can collectively abandon the practice” (op.cit.:59). Similarly, Van Bavel, Coene and Leye (2017) argue that supportive projects should be defined by the community and be designed and developed together with members of the community. Moreover, being careful with using pre-defined goals, as the effect of outsiders’ opposition to the practice may lead to a backlash effect on anti-fgm (op.cit.:1356). Alike, Latham (2016) claims that “essential to change are both the receipt of new information from a credible source as to why it is best for the practice to end, and a public commitment to abandon, so people know that they are not acting alone, thereby jeopardizing their own children’s future by doing so” (op.cit.:11). This is only possible through a community approach incorporating the whole community in the elimination of the practice.

Better understanding	Authors
Cultural awareness: 8 articles	Anuforo, Oyedele and Pacquiao (2004), Baron & Denmark (2006), Gruenbaum (2005), Im, Swan & Heaton (2019), Manderson (2007), Rouzi (2013), Veila, Argo (& others) (2015), Wilson (2012)
Perception of fgm: 4 articles	Bedri & Bradley (2017), Bergom Lunde & Sagbakken (2014), Parikh, Saruchera & Liao (2018), Renshaw (2006)
Community approach: 6 articles	Gruenbaum (2006), Kinyanjui (20002), Latham (2016), Mollerma & Franse (2009), Payne (& others) (2019), Van Bavel, Coene & Leye (2017)
Other: 2 articles	Ali & Strøm (2012), Ogunsiji, Wilkes & Jackson (2007)

Table 16. Table of the data within the sub-category of ‘better understanding’

## Education

The focus on how the best strategy in the elimination of fgm is to provide education, is identified in five articles (Table 17). Even though other articles may include an educational aspect in their suggested strategies, these five articles have the main focus that the needed strategies in the elimination of fgm should be focused around educational interventions. For instance, Fahmy, El-Mouelhy and Ragab (2010) claim that “political commitment must be combined by strong advocacy and educational programmes” (op.cit.:187) and stress the importance of providing education to all parties of the society, including health workers, police, attorneys, social workers, younger and older generations. Monahan (2007) argues that the way forward is through education and awareness everywhere. Better interventions should not pose the eradication as an outside cultural imperialistic value or forced ideology, but however, improve education for women and their decision-making power. Ako and Akweongo (2009) claim that it is proven that community sensitization and education have discouraged the continuation of fgm, but that “no specific organization has been assigned this responsibility” (op.cit.:49). Resulting in the lack of measure, political, and funding emphasis on the elimination of fgm. Odeku, Rembe and Anwo (2009) claim that “education is fundamental in changing public opinion, as well as offering reasonable alternatives to fgm that still accomplishes some of its social functions” (op.cit.:57).

Education	Authors
Provide education: 5 articles	Ako & Akwaengo (2009), Fahmy, El-Mouelhy & Ragab (2010), Khalil (2006), Monahan (2007), Odeku, Rembe & Anwo (2009)

Table 17. Table of the data within the sub-category of ‘education’

## Address the issue differently

18 articles are identified to stress the need to address the issue of fgm differently, as the most important strategy in the elimination of fgm. This sub-category emerges through three different foci. These are the need to address the issue differently with regard to legislation, the discourse around the issue, or the need for completely new ways of intervening (Table 18). For instance, Berer (2015) stresses the need to address the issue of fgm differently in Britain, and questions if the existence of the law on fgm is a productive strategy at all. Similarly, Gaffney-Rhys (2019) argues for putting more emphasis on civil society instead of the

criminalization of fgm in England and Wales. Furthermore, Shell-Duncan (2008) claims that issues of ethnocentrism, and western imposing of western values and ideology through the human rights, have undermined what could be a multicultural human rights corpus. Namely, a multicultural corpus where issues of fgm is approached with solutions, which both protects human rights and respect the culture to those practicing fgm. Moreover, Dustin (2010) argues that the way the issue of fgm is perpetuated and articulated in the legislation in the UK, needs to be addressed differently. Arguing that there needs to be “clarity about what is at the heart of the anti-FGM/C campaign” (op.cit.:19), and “one way would be to argue for the application of consistent principles of choice and the recognition of all non-therapeutic bodily modifications as ‘cultural’ [...] while the real work of changing the attitudes that produce these practice takes place” (op.cit.:20).

Similar concerns about the inconsistency in the legislation on fgm, are raised among some of the articles focusing on how the discourse need to be changed. For instance, Paakkanen (2019) claims that the different discourses on fgm, male circumcision, and cosmetic surgeries, and how the issues are discussed, defined, and created in different discourses need to change. Similarly, Bergom Lunde, Hauge (& others) (2020) argue that as long as male circumcision and fgm is not treated the same, fgm will never be eliminated. In example, “the Norwegian government somehow neglects the ‘relatively strong support of gender equality in Norway’ where the debate has focused on equality as sameness” (op.cit.:16), and by not treating the issues the same, the discourse used by the government contributes to the “global hegemonic ‘facts’ that male and female children have differing genital predispositions and should be treated differently when it comes to cutting of their genitalia” (op.cit.:12). Similar claim of unequal treatment of practices is raised by Khaja and Barkdull (& others) (2009) as one of their findings in a study on African women living in North America, who claimed that “North American criminal and family law turns a blind eye to its own ethnocentric traditions, but punished traditional practices of people from other continents, particular people of color” (op.cit.:735).

Interestingly, and standing out, Njambi (2004) does not explicitly argues that fgm should be eliminated, but stresses the need to address the issue differently by questioning

how it is determined which of these practices leads to a risk that warrants the emergence of a global eradication movement? How do we discuss these issues without creating an imperialistic impression that only those with some social, political, and economic power and who live in the west have rights to take risks with their bodies? (op.cit.:299).

Some of the articles suggest completely different ways to approach the issue of fgm. These include Piroozi's (& others) (2019) perception that the sociocultural status of affected women should be improved, and program to boost awareness of the issue to change the viewpoint of cultural leaders should be implemented. Owojuyigbe (2017) suggests similar interventions, focusing on involving traditional and religious leaders in anti-fgm initiatives. Moreover, claims that isolated acts such as educating female students produce no effect. Focusing on religious leaders is also suggested by Alkhalaileh, Hayford, Norris and Gallo (2017), who argue that the best strategy is to promote adherence, such as changing social norms through religious edicts, and "explore the important role of community norms and how these are instituted and perpetuated, particularly in rural location where people have poor access to education" (op.cit.:181), as well as increase the independence of women through economic opportunities.

Akintunde (2010) argues for creating the awareness of women's roles in the elimination of fgm, based on educating women about their role in the elimination as they are the transmitters of culture. Holistically, Small, Sharma (& others) (2019) recommend "an intracultural collaboration between local leaders, government, health professionals, and religious leaders to address the issue" (op.cit.:8), and moreover "an understanding of the complex sociocultural imperatives of this practice is important to guide the intervention efforts" (op.cit.:9). Collaboration is also suggested by Dustin and Phillips (2008), who argue that the government should turn to people with relevant experience and expertise, and if these people are consulted, there is a chance for devising more effective initiatives.

Another interest suggestion, is Christou and Fowles' (2015) suggestion of encouraging parents not to consent to fgm, arguing that "measures are required that adjust the balance of motivation for parents, to encourage them to choose to protect their child from fgm rather than maintain their place in community power dynamics" (op.cit.:347-48). Moreover, they

claim that, if parents deny consenting on a wide enough scale, the practice will lose its social status. Resulting in decreasing the power and influence of those promoting fgm, and increase the power and influence of those opposing it, and thus, this is the best strategy to eliminate the practice.

Address it differently	Authors
Legislation: 5 articles	Berer (2015), Dustin (2010), Gaffney-Rhys (2019), Gill, Van Engeland (2014), Shell-Duncan (2008)
Discourse: 4 articles	Bergom Lunde, Hauge (& others) (2020), Khaja, Barkdull (& others) (2009), Njambi (2004), Paakkanen (2019)
Other interventions: 9 articles	Ahmed (& others) (2017), Akintunde (2010), Alkhalailah, Hayford, Norris & Gallo (2017), Brown, Mwangi-Powell, Jerotich & le May (2016), Christou & Fowles (2015), Dustin & Phillips (2008), Owojuyigbe (2017), Piroozi (& others) (2019), Small, Sharma (& others) (2019)

Table 18. Table of the data within the sub-category of 'address it differently'

Summing up, the literature analysis chapter illustrates the great complexity of the literature reviewed. However, through an extensively structuring and categorization of the literature, the literature has been analyzed in a way which makes a great amount of data compatible and moreover, given a wider significance.

## Discussion

Recalling the problem formulation could be beneficial at this point;

*How does current scholarship address the issue of female genital mutilation and how can a theoretical framework incorporating both structure and agency affect the understanding of fgm with regard to its elimination?*

Integral to the problem formulation, is the hypothesis that the current literature could benefit from a structuration theory framework, implying that such a theoretical framework is not already incorporated in the current literature. The analysis chapter above has extensively examined how current scholarship addresses the issue of fgm. In addition to examining how scholarship addresses the issue of female genital mutilation, the chapter simultaneously explored whether a theoretical framework incorporating structure and agency was present in the current literature or not.

The next step in answering the problem formulation, which will be the aim of this chapter, is a consolidation of the findings from the analysis and application of the theoretical framework of structuration theory, by using Anthony Giddens' theoretical concepts on the nexus of structure and agency. Ultimately, the forthcoming chapter will explore the question of how the current literature on the issue of fgm could benefit from an approach incorporating considerations of structure and agency. The purpose of this discussion chapter is to explore how such a consolidation would affect the understanding of the elimination of fgm. The chapter constitutes of a critical examination of the findings from the analysis in parallel with an application of the structuration theory. Hence, the chapter contains a discussion, interpreting and analysing the significance of the findings from the analysis in light of the structuration theory, before proceeding to the conclusion chapter.

## Findings from the analysis

The body of literature is large, and as the analysis shows, the literature is very complex. Moreover, the analysis illustrates that there are a great variety of approaches, perceptions, understandings, and arguments within the scholarly literature on the issue of fgm. The literature is descriptively analysed and categorized as a result of various notions identified in the literature. Moreover, this thorough categorization is illustrated through the use of figures

and tables. The findings of the analysis are somehow partly the categorization as such, and partly the various notions identified within the different themes, sub-themes, categories, and sub-categories. Hence, the findings from the analysis are already explored in the literature analysis chapter above. Even though there are many different notions identified in the analysis which would be interesting to examine further, some notions are more relevant with regard to the problem formulation, than others. Ultimately, these findings are the findings which are interesting to explore in the light of the structuration theory.

Overall, none of the articles which were analysed entailed a theoretical framework of structuration theory. However, several of the articles include various notions and perceptions incorporating *some* considerations of structure and agency. Nevertheless, none of the articles include a comprehensive emphasis on *both* structure and agency. Moreover, the literature on the issue of fgm, with regard to the framework of structuration theory, may be categorized into three categories. This categorization is illustrated in the table below (Table 19). One kind where it is not relevant to incorporate considerations of structure and agency. This category emerges through the identification of the aim and purpose of the article being irrelevant to the application of structuration theory. One kind where it *is* relevant to incorporate the theoretical framework of structuration theory, and the literature does not include considerations of *either* structure *or* agency. This category emerges through foci on various aspects of the issue of fgm, including the understanding of how to eliminate the practices. Lastly, there is one kind where considerations of structure have been included to various extent, but the literature lacks a satisfactory incorporation of considerations of agency. Both of the latter kinds of literature could seemingly benefit from incorporating a theoretical framework including considerations of both structure and agency, as the forthcoming critical analysis will explore. This is especially the case, I would argue, in regard to furthering the understanding of how the eliminate fgm.

Noteworthy, the categorization of the two relevant kinds of literature is somehow complicated. Some of the articles identified to neither include structure nor agency, is categorized as such based on the absent of arguments of how fgm fits into a structure which encourage the practice to continue. Thus, in these articles, fgm may be connected to 'structural' factors, but this connection is not given much attention in the arguments.

Furthermore, the articles identified to include considerations of structure but not agency, include structure in various ways, to different degrees, and both explicitly and implicit. In example, Van Bavel, Coene and Leye (2017) do not explicitly express how fgm is part of a structure, but argue that fgm is a “self-enforcing norm that ensures that individuals continue the practice” (op.cit.:1345), sanctions those who try to deviate from it (op.cit.:1354), and moreover, that individuals feel “powerlessness as individuals to go against the pressure of cultural norms” (op.cit.:1355). Thus, they are implying that fgm is part of a social norm structure in the communities, which encourages fgm to continue. Ultimately, the article is categorized as including considerations of structure. Other articles have been categorized based on similar reasoning.

Kinds of literature	Authors
Irrelevant: 29 articles	Abdulcadir, Rodriguez & Say (2014), Andersson (& others) (2012), Bell (2005), Bergom Lunde, Hauge (& others) (2020), Cappa, Van Baelen & Leye (2019), Catania (& others) (2007), Darby & Svoboda (2008), Guiné & Fuentes (2007), Jefferson (2015), Johnsdotter (2012), Khaja & Barkdull (& others) (2009), Khaled & Cox (2000), Ljeoma & Nkiru (2008), Njambi (2004), Obermeyer (2005), Paakkanen (2019), Palm, Essén & Johnsdotter (2019), Pardy, Rogers & Seuffert (2020), Parikh, Saruchera & Liao (2018), Payne (& others) (2019), Perez (& others) (2014), Piroozi (& others) (2019), Rahnlenbeck & Mekommen (2009), Shweder (2013), Sobel (2015), Vloeberghs, van der Kwaak, Knipscheer & van den Muijsenbergh (2012), Wade (2009), Wade (2011), Wade (2012)
Neither structure nor agency: 15 articles	Abdulla (2018), Ako & Akweongo (2009), Ali & Strøm (2012), Anuforo, Oyedele & Pacquiao (2004), Bedri & Bradley (2017), Berer (2015), Bergom Lunde & Sagbakken (2014), Gruenbaum (2006), Jackson (2007), Kathleen (2007), Kinyanjui (2002), Renshaw (2006), Rouzi (2013), Shell-Duncan (2008), Veila, Argo (& others) (2015)
Structure but not agency: 26 articles	Ahmed, Magdy (& others) (2017), Akintunde (2010), Alkhalaileh, Hayford, Norris & Gallo (2017), Baron & Denmark (2006), Brown, Mwangi-Powell, Jerotich & le May (2016), Christou & Fowles (2015), Dustin (2010), Dustin & Phillips (2008), Epstein, Graham & Rimsza (2001), Fahmy, El-Mouelhy & Ragab (2010), Gaffney-Rhys (2019), Gill & van Engeland (2014), Guenbaum (2005), Hughes (2018), Im, Swan & Heaton (2019), Johnsdotter & Essén (2010), Khalil (2006), Latham (2016), Manderson (2007), Mollerman and Franse (2009), Odeku, Rembe & Anwo (2009), Omigbodun, Bella-Awusah (& others) (2020), Owojuyigbe (2017), Small, Sharma (& others) (2019), Van Bavel, Coene & Leye (2017), Wilson (2012)

Table 19. Illustrates the three different kinds of literature identified in the findings from the analysis with regard to the incorporation of considerations of structure and agency

### Irrelevant findings

Some of the articles do not include any focus on elimination of fgm at all. As seen in the analysis, out of the 70 articles, 38 articles were identified to entail explanations for 'reasons for continuation', 34 articles were identified to entail explanations of 'challenges of elimination', and only 43 articles were identified to entail notions of 'strategies to elimination' of fgm. Many of those articles were present in more than one of these categories. The rest of the literature did not entail such foci, and this may be explained in various ways. For instance, if the focus of a medical research article is the medical consequences of the practice, explanations of challenges or strategies in the elimination of fgm, does not necessarily contribute to the purpose of the article. Similarly, if the main purpose of the article is to discuss the discourse on the way fgm is portrayed in the media or in legislation, the challenges or strategies in the elimination of the practice is not necessarily given attention, as those foci would not contribute to the purpose of the article. Naturally, such articles would not benefit from incorporating a theoretical framework of structuration theory, as this would not contribute to the purpose of the article. Ultimately, such a theoretical framework is not already incorporated, and I would argue that this kind of literature on the issue of fgm would not necessarily benefit much from incorporating it either.

These findings from the analysis may still be interesting, however, attention to these kinds of findings is not given here, as it is simply not relevant for the purpose of answering my problem formulation. However, it is important to note that this is not automatically an indicator of a weakness in the presented hypothesis. It merely illustrates the diversity of the literature. However, there are other articles which do not incorporate such a theoretical framework either, but could perhaps benefit from doing so. These are the findings from the analysis which are relevant for this chapter.

### Critical analysis of relevant findings

When looking for literature which does not incorporate considerations of *neither* structure *nor* agency, but could perhaps benefit from such considerations, one can start by looking at the findings from the category of 'understanding of fgm'. For instance, the literature which is

identified to mainly understand the practice of fgm as a tradition, is classified partly based on the lack of seeing fgm in connection with a broader context. Ultimately, without connecting the practice to any broader context, either by denying that fgm should be considered as something more than a tradition, or simply by not connecting the practice to the social structure in the fgm practicing communities, there is no incorporation of considerations of structure. In addition, by looking at the findings in the literature from all four categories, there are several articles relevant for the application of structuration theory as indicated in the table above (Table 19).

#### Neither structure nor agency

Recalling the findings from the internship project, it is both important and beneficial for the understanding of the practice and the elimination of it, to emphasise how fgm is a part of structure within the practicing communities. Articles which do not incorporate such an understanding may thus fall short in their approach to the issue of fgm, specifically with regard to the elimination of the practice. One example can be seen in Renshaw's article (2006), where she argues that fgm is a historically and culturally embedded tradition. By reviewing genital mutilation in its cultural contexts, she explores both male and female genital mutilation, advocating for a change in the social practices of genital mutilation. Moreover, she notes the importance of respecting how "cultural customs are very deeply embedded in beliefs and emotions. They also carry political component because those whose income depends on the practice will resist its cessation" (op.cit.:285). However, even though fgm is identified to be connected to political components, no consideration of how the practice of fgm is connected to a structure of some kind is proposed or included. Following Giddens, the repetition of deeply embedded social practices, like fgm, is in fact institutionalized in the societies. Some attention is given to how the tradition is a deeply sedimented social practice, but it is not perceived as being institutionalized. However, this is explained in the article as a result of strong beliefs regarding the importance of the practice. Ultimately, the understanding of fgm is limited to only including how the practice is a tradition. As a result, the article falls short in providing a strategy of how the wanted social change may be achieved. Including considerations of structure and agency, could assumingly widen the understanding of fgm per se, and ultimately, affect the understanding of how to achieve the change in the cultural custom, as the article initially advocates for.

Similarly, Bradley and Bedri (2017) are identified to understand fgm as a harmful tradition, arguing that “FGM is an unspeakable brutal example of what humans are capable of” (op.cit.:31), without putting fgm in connection with the broader context of structures. Moreover, their understanding of the elimination of fgm is mostly focused on the discourse around fgm, and how the current interventions to eliminate the practice may be disconnected from the “very individuals whose mindsets need to be shifted but also from those who represent the powerful vehicle for change needed” (op.cit.:36). Consequently, they are identified to understand the needed strategy to eliminate fgm, to be a change in the perception of fgm. However, they do not suggest the need to incorporate considerations of either structure or agency in this perception of fgm (or in the change of this perception).

Even though it may be an important point that interventions to eliminate fgm should focus on changing the mindset of those who practice it, this seem difficult to achieve without considering how fgm is not only a tradition, but inevitably, closely connected to deeply sedimented social structures, following Giddens. Ultimately, it could be argued that an incorporation of a theoretical framework considering structure and agency, could widen their scope, and affect their understanding of the elimination of fgm in a positive matter. The same argument is current for many of the other articles with similar perceptions. Such perceptions can be exemplified with the articles of the second category in the table above (Table 19).

#### Structure but not agency

Several articles include, either explicitly or not, a focus on structure. For instance, recalling the articles identified within the sub-categories; ‘social norm’, ‘societal framework’, and ‘institutionalized’, these are all categorized based on the fact that they entail various perceptions including some kind of considerations of structure. However, these considerations of structure are not necessarily put in connection with considerations of agency. Recalling the elaboration on Giddens’ criticism of frameworks of social theory, the literature seemingly tends to bend towards being either similar to functionalism or structuralism, by, to various degrees, theorising structure, but lacking an adequate emphasis on theory of action.

Looking closer at some of these findings, by critically analysing some examples from the literature, while applying structuration theory, an extensive exemplification of how the literature could benefit from incorporating considerations of structure and agency, may be provided. For instance, Akintunde (2010) is identified to understand fgm as a cruel tradition, explains the reasons for continuation based on 'positive effects' of various kinds, and sees the challenge of the elimination based on how the practice is structurally institutionalized by the society to suppress womanhood. Moreover, argues for addressing the issue differently, by educating women about their role in the elimination. Looking closer, these perceptions entail several of the concepts within structuration theory, without explicitly stating so, or drawing on that framework in the article.

Akintunde (2010) puts emphasis on how the social practice of fgm is an old and cruel tradition. Moreover, by arguing that fgm is an institutionalized manifestation of the suppression of womanhood, fgm is connected to a "virtual order of rules and resources" (Dickie-Clark 1984:101), as Giddens' defines structures to be. Additionally, it may demonstrate Giddens' perception of institutions as a result of repetition of deeply embedded social practices. Moreover, Akintunde (2010) explains the reasons for continuation of fgm based on how people perceive the practice as being 'good' for different reasons. Some of these reasons are structural factors of the fgm practicing communities, similar to the factors identified in the findings from the internship project. Thus, the perceptions in the article can be connected to how Giddens conceives structure as "the rules and resources used by actors in the production and reproduction of social practices designed to pursue their intentions and interest" (Dickie-Clark 1984:101). Akintunde's (2010) claim that people in Nigeria practice fgm based on how fgm for example "preserve family honour" (op.cit.:200) exemplifies this. The practice of fgm is, in other words, (re)produced by actors to pursue their intentions and interests, which in this case could be to keep up the social status for the family by preserving the honour of the family.

Akintunde (2010) claims, moreover, that fgm is "an attempt by the society in the name of culture to suppress womanhood and to perpetuate women's submissiveness to men. It is a construction by men to satisfy their selfish ends" (op.cit.:203). In that claim, Akintunde identifies the existence of structures, but leans toward a framework which gives too much

emphasis on the static existence of structure, and consequently, does not recognize the social actors, who are creating the structure through interaction and repetition of social practices.

In addition, such a claim can be seen in connection to Giddens' account for power as involving "relations of autonomy and dependence in circumstances where the outcome requires the agency of others" (Dickie-Clark 1984:97). According to Akintunde, explained in the light of structuration theory, fgm is part of a structure where women are dependent on men, where men have more power than women, and fgm is a means to sustain this gendered power relation. However, according to Giddens, subordinates will always have some power, and this measure of autonomous power reinforces the possibility of social change. Akintunde (2010) falls short in exploring this measure of autonomous power and the limitation of action is enhanced.

Interestingly, despite the lack of a sufficient theory of action, Akintunde (2010), with regard to strategies in elimination fgm, reinstates women as inheriting autonomous power by arguing that the best way to eliminate the practice, is to educate women on their role in the elimination. However, this suggestion is not grounded in the theory of power or recognition of women as active and skilled agents, with capabilities to actively negotiate the interactions and relationships they produce by using the transformative capacity they have, as Giddens argues. On the other hand, their autonomous power is based on the assumption that women are the transmitters of culture. Which is not necessarily wrong, however, according to the structuration theory, such a strategy could benefit from not only focusing on the autonomy power grounded in being transmitters of culture, but by reinforcing women as autonomous, active, and skilled agents. Moreover, by focusing on how human social life is open for change through conscious efforts from those who live it. Thus, the possibility to remake the fgm encouraging structure may be reinstated based on how the structure may be changed by those who had a share in making it. In other words, both women and men inherit this power, if they only have the knowledge that they can do so. In that way, Akintunde's (2010) understanding of fgm with regard to the elimination of fgm, could benefit from including considerations of structure and agency.

Another similar example is the article of Baron and Denmark (2006). They argue for the importance of understanding and exploring the cultural significance of fgm, in light of the socio-political climate in the cultural context of the practices. Baron and Denmark (2006) are among those identified as understanding fgm mainly as a tradition. However, in comparison to other articles in this sub-category, they put the tradition in connection to the ideological structure of practicing communities. They explain the reasons for continuation of fgm based on a 'structural framework', arguing that fgm "is an institutionalized form of violence against women, that is accepted by the government and seen by the community as a cultural obligation" (op.cit.:353). Hence, this understanding may be connected to Giddens' concept of structure. Additionally, it exemplifies how Giddens' concept of temporality may be applied to the findings. The concept of temporality is how Giddens brings social interaction and institutionalized practises together. In other words, in Baron and Denmark's (2006) understanding of fgm as "an institutionalized form of violence against women" (op.cit.:353), fgm is perceived as a social act carried out across differences in time and space, resulting in the practicing being institutionalized. In that way, fgm, as a time-space existing social practice, is sustained, transmitted and extended through space and time, which is fundamental for the existence of any structure. In other words, fgm is a social practice repeated across time and space, and this repetition of social practices is what recognizes deeply embedded structures of societies, according to Giddens. Ultimately, these structures of society are a result of social interaction, thus, it may be also be remade by social actors.

Moreover, if fgm is seen as 'accepted' and a 'cultural obligation' it may be connected to Giddens' concept of lay knowledge, as it may be perceived as "common-sense understandings possessed by actors within shared cultural milieux" (Giddens in Dickie-Clark 1984:96). This would underline the actors' awareness and ability to reflect, monitor, and modify their conduct. Which, moreover, underlines the practical and voluntary nature of action. Ultimately, according to Giddens, social actors inherit the competence to be conscious about the repetition of social practices, including the practice of fgm, which, according to Baron and Denmark (2006), is seen as a cultural obligation. However, this recognition is not present in the article, and as a result, the article rejects the practical and voluntarist nature of social action, and thus it rejects actors' autonomous power.

Consequently, the structure, which is encouraging fgm to continue, is seen as a static structure of violence against women. An understanding which, as a result, limits the possibilities of action and thus, social change. Interestingly, regarding the strategies to eliminate fgm, they argue for better understanding of the sociocultural dynamics in the practicing communities, with the aim to create educational programs, by focusing on the “women who are responsible for the intergenerational transmission of the practice” (op.cit.:352). In other words, their considerations of structure and agency are very similar to Akintunde’s (2010), including the same weaknesses. Ultimately, it could be argued that Baron and Denmark (2006) would also benefit from incorporating a theoretical framework including considerations of structure and agency.

Christou and Fowles’ (2015) article is another example of how the literature may entail considerations of structure and agency, but could benefit from incorporating such a theoretical framework in a more comprehensive way. In comparison to the two earlier examples, this article is identified within the theme of ‘framework’, and it explores the gaps in the law on fgm in the UK, and the state’s international obligation to protect girls from fgm. They understand fgm as “a function of power structures within practicing communities. So-called ‘cultural practices’ like FGM are part of a system which ensures the powerful, within a practicing community, remain powerful” (op.ci.t:345). Moreover, fgm is presented as a “necessary part of womanhood according to their cultural beliefs” (op.cit.:346), and “is based on a patriarchal social power structure in which a woman must conform to an extreme interpretation of ‘ideal femininity’ in order to be accepted by the wider community” (ibid.). Interestingly, like the articles explored above, these perceptions can be understood in light of Giddens’ concepts of structuration theory. For instance, the article, without explicitly saying so, situates the social practice of fgm as part of a structure which actors use to pursue their intentions and interests, for example, women’s acceptance by the wider community.

In other words, fgm is perceived as a social practice carried out by people as a means to be accepted by the community, conform to the cultural perception of womanhood and moreover, to sustain the current power structure in the community. Following Giddens, when fgm is understood as a part of a structure, like the statements above indicate, it illustrates how social practices are both enabled and constrained by structure. Fgm as a social practice

captures thus, how social actors are constrained by rules and resources (meaning, norms and power). Moreover, the social practice of fgm is interweaved with the structure that allows the (re)production of the social practice of fgm. Ultimately, the statements demonstrate Giddens' concept of dualism of structure, meaning, how "social structures are both constituted by human agency, and yet at the same time are the very medium of this constitution" (Dickie-Clark 1984:102). Consequently, structure and agency are co-dependent, and human agency is what enable and constrain the structure which fgm is a part of. Likewise, the structure both enable and constrain human agency.

However, alike the other articles above, not enough emphasis is put on considerations of agency. Both the continuation of fgm and challenge in eliminating fgm, are explained through the powerful patriarchal structure. Simultaneously, Christou and Fowles (2015) reject women's active role in producing and reproducing the structure through interaction, and production and reproduction of social practices. Similar to the other articles, women are reinstated as active agents in their perceptions of the elimination of fgm. Namely, when they argue that the best strategy to eliminate fgm is to encourage parents to protect their child from fgm rather than maintaining their place in the community power dynamics. This strategy is close to incorporating notions of both structure and agency. However, it falls short in explaining how such an encouragement would happen, and moreover, does not entail any considerations of the other structural factors which are also encouraging fgm to continue. It would not be unrealistic to imagine that this strategy would thus fail to eliminate fgm, without in addition also encourage changing the gendered power relations of the social structure in the practicing communities in general.

Summing up, by applying Giddens' concepts of structuration theory to the findings from the analysis, it illustrates how the application of the framework of structuration theory may affect the understanding of fgm. Moreover, it demonstrates that even though such a theoretical framework is not explicitly used in the scholars' approach to the issue of fgm, it is relevant and may even widen the scope of their arguments. Furthermore, several other articles could be critically analysed in light of the structuration theory as the ones above. However, even if such an extensive elaboration could be interesting, it would presumably only underline the same findings as above. As shown above, a theoretical framework of considerations of *both*

structure and agency, is not comprehensively incorporated in the current literature, and I would argue that it could benefit from doing so. Several scholars are incorporating considerations of structure. Underlining the internship project findings regarding why fgm should be understood in connection to the structural institution of the practicing communities. However, even though the reviewed articles include considerations of structure, they fall short in recognizing the possibilities for social change through agency, by not recognizing the importance of theory of action.

Notably, it is impossible to say whether any of the strategies suggested in the literature would be successful in the elimination of fgm or not. However, according to the structuration theory, the literature lacks the emphasis on *both* structure and agency needed to understand the possibility for social change. Thus, the various strategies would probably not be satisfactory in changing the structures which are encouraging the practice of fgm to continue. As a result, possibilities of remaking the deeply embedded organizations of societies is limited.

#### Interesting side notes

Interestingly, common in the literature, including the three just-explored examples, is the establishment of the mainstream gender role perception of men as proactive perpetrators and women as passive victims. In this case, it is current regarding how, when fgm is perceived as an expression of the patriarchal system or an expression of gender-based violence, fgm is established as something done *to* women *by* men. Interestingly, besides this, several articles recognize women's participation in and execution of the practices itself. However, this active role in the (re)production of the practice of fgm is often rejected or ignored. This raises interesting questions regarding the concept of agency. Moreover, common in the literature is that both the continuation of fgm and challenges in elimination of fgm is explained in ways which support this gendered stereotype. However, very few articles include men in the considerations regarding the elimination of the practice. On the contrary, with regard to the elimination of fgm in the literature, women are commonly perceived as the proactive agents important for the elimination of fgm. Whether the establishing of this gender role stereotype is on purpose or not, the implications and limitations entailed in this view could perhaps be interesting to explore further. However, it suggests that the literature on the issue of fgm perhaps "reflect and enforces deeply rooted and culturally biased gender issues" (Paakkanen

2019:1495). Which raises interesting questions regarding the structures constituted by scholars' agency, and at the same time how scholars' agency is the very medium of that constitution.

Interestingly, several articles argue that the current legislation discriminates between women from traditional communities and women from industrial communities, with regard to their agency. As a result, the literature entails inconsistency with regard to women's agency, and agency per se, suggesting that the concept of agency is something that is up to debate. Moreover, it implies that agency may be either given or rejected according to what seems fitting in specific contexts. This discriminatory inconsistency would be overcome through the use of structuration theory, which would claim that *all* social actors entail autonomous power, and thus agency. Consequently, despite any gender regime, all social actors inherit both responsibilities for the current social structure as well as the possibilities to change it. I would argue that the literature analysed in this thesis could benefit from incorporating this dual recognition, as it would affect the understanding of fgm and moreover, how to eliminate it.

Lastly, one of Giddens' main points is that people are constructing the social life through repeatedly (re)producing structures through their social practices. As a result, social change is possible, as long as people are aware of their capabilities to change the social structures. An interesting question is whether people are aware of their autonomous power to change the structures they continuously are producing and reproducing. Another question is perhaps whether academic scholars are aware of this autonomous power of people or not. The latter question is quite interesting, as seemingly no article in the literature analysed here propose such an awareness in the approach to the issue of fgm.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings from my internship project, which the thesis expands on, including a theoretical framework, such as structuration theory, is suggested to be beneficial in the approach to the issue of fgm. Especially, in tackling the question of how to successfully eliminate the practices of fgm. As the problem formulation indicates, the thesis has extensively examined how the current scholarship address the issue of fgm. Moreover, this examination has explored whether the current literature already incorporates considerations of both structure and agency. As the thesis demonstrates, this is not the case. Thus, the posed hypothesis may be considered confirmed.

Moreover, the findings from the analysis with the application of structuration theory, demonstrate how an incorporation of structure and agency affect the understanding of fgm with regard to its elimination. Namely, by including considerations of both structure and agency, one can improve the understanding of the complexity of fgm practices. When understanding fgm as a deeply sedimented social practice as part of a structure, it affects the understanding of how to eliminate it. In addition, if considerations of agency are not considered, the understanding of how the social practice is sustained and (re)produced through agency will lack. Moreover, the understanding of how agency is both enabled and constrained through structure, will also be absent. Ultimately, an understanding of fgm, without comprehensively including consideration of structure and agency, will presumably not lead to the successful elimination of fgm. Drawing on Giddens' theoretical concepts regarding the nexus of structure and agency, the thesis demonstrates that fgm should be understood as a repeated social practice. This repetition results in fgm becoming a part of deeply embedded organizations of societies. Hence, fgm is part of the structure which enables and constrains human agency. Simply put, fgm will persist as long as people continue to act in accordance with what is appropriate and expected behavior. However, following Giddens', the structure which encourage fgm to continue, is not static, but (re)produced through people's agency. Ultimately, the structure, despite how deeply embedded it is, may be remade by the same people who had a share in making it. Thus, possibilities to eradicate the social practice of fgm exist. Conclusively, the thesis has explored the implications for understanding fgm through the nexus of structure and agency, and how incorporating such a

theoretical framework will inevitably affect the understanding of the elimination of fgm. Thus, the thesis answers the presented problem formulation.

Remarkably, even though Giddens' structuration theory entails various concepts important for understanding the nexus of structure and agency with regard to the elimination of fgm, Giddens' theory falls short in exploring how to actually implement change in the structures which are encouraging fgm to continue. Hence, by missing practical suggestions for achieving social change, the theory may fall short in the quest for specific strategies to successfully eliminate fgm. However, by drawing on the findings from this thesis, future research concerning such strategies could presumably benefit from including structuration theory.

The motivation behind both my internship project and the thesis, was the experiences I gained while living in a society where fgm is being practiced. The stories from courageous girls from societies where fgm and child marriage are commonalities, demonstrated for me, the importance of dividing attention to the issue of fgm. Moreover, exploring how to approach the issue in a manner which will eventually lead to the elimination of fgm. Because, importantly, the practice of fgm has real material implications for the lived lives of millions of people. Despite of the abstract and theoretical character of the thesis, I would argue that the findings presented here illustrate possibilities to approach the issue of fgm in a way which may contribute to the elimination of the practice. Moreover, I would argue that the thesis includes several interesting questions and considerations worth further researching. Additionally, the thesis is carried out based on a personal belief in the possibilities to enhance the elimination of fgm, if the approach to the issue is comprehensively including considerations of structure and agency, as it is extensively argued for all along this project.

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