

200 million women and girls live with female genital mutilation, says U.N.

[according to a new UNICEF report](#) published in time for Saturday's International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM, as the practice is often abbreviated.

The report says 70 million more victims than previously thought have undergone the "violent practice."

The exact number remains unknown.

"In every case FGM violates the rights of girls and women," said UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Geeta Rao Gupta. "We must all accelerate efforts – governments, health professionals, community leaders, parents and families – to eliminate the practice."

Under 5 years old

Although female genital mutilation is carried out in many countries, the report says that more than half of those who have undergone it live in just three countries – Indonesia, Egypt and Ethiopia.

Data shows the highest rates of genital mutilation among women between the ages of 15 to 49 are in Somalia, Guinea, and Djibouti.

In most countries, the majority of girls subjected to the practice are younger than 5. About one fourth of all cases worldwide were girls under the age of 14.

"We start at three months," said Josephine Akissi Coulibaly, a former excisionist in Cote D'Ivoire. "They are small and we do it. Sometimes they're 18 years old."

Sometimes they are mothers even. Often they bleed.”

While female genital mutilation is illegal in many countries, numerous communities consider the practice part of their cultural traditions and continue performing it.

“When you try to convince an excisionist, she won’t listen because it’s her livelihood,” said Molao Bomisso, National Director of OIS Afrique, a UNICEF partner. “But we keep insisting and insisting.”

FMG is often performed in conditions that lack proper hygiene, supplies and medications. As a result, the girls and women suffer infections, painful scarring, long-term disabilities and in some cases death.