



FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

A look at female circumcision/female genitalia cutting.

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There are a number of inconceivably sinister and barbarous acts which are committed by humans against fellow humans. But nothing can be more sinister than FGM (female genital mutilation) – also called female circumcision and female genitalia cutting.

Can anyone in today's civilised world imagine cutting women's genitalia (clitoris, inner and outer folds of the vaginal opening) leaving behind at times, a very small hole, the size of the head of a matchstick, meant only for urination and menstruation? And all this for the sake of tradition or to preserve virginity or to dissuade promiscuity among women or to respect the religious sentiments?

The only other act which may perhaps be equated with this brutality

of the most heinous nature, is the chain of child brothels of Cambodia where children as young as two years old are forced into prostitution.

The question is what is FGM? Why FGM? Does FGM still exist?

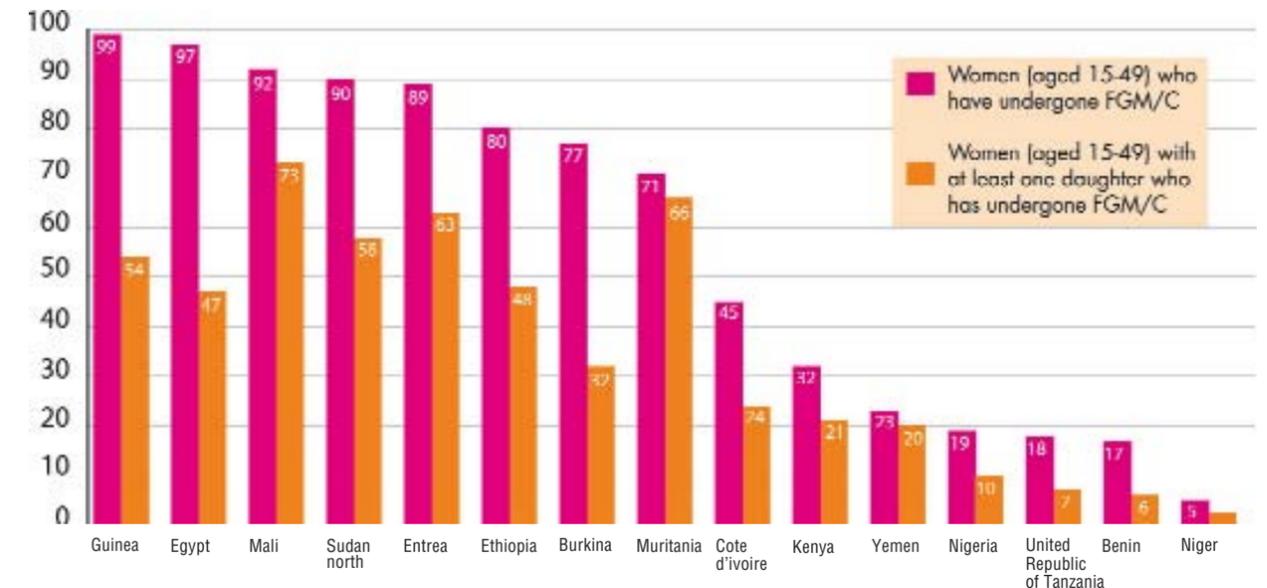
WHO describes FGM as "the range of procedures which involve the partial or complete removal of the external female genitalia; or other injury to the female genital organs for cultural or any other non-therapeutic reason."

No one knows who started this ghastly practice. Nor does one know where it originated. Most of the anthropologists and researchers are clueless as to what precisely is the reason for a practice like this. Perhaps, tradition, culture, religion, sense of insecurity about women on the part of men, patriarchal mindset, a bid to ensure the chastity and virginity of women, misconception

that it is hygienic, myth that FGM enhances the sexual pleasure of men, could be a few of the myriad reasons, individually or collectively.

It is believed that, on an average, two million female children go through FGM every year mostly in African countries but including others too. To name a few, this practice is still prevalent in Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Mauritania, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Kenya, Togo, Senegal, Yemen, Oman, Iraqi Kurdistan, Israel, etc. Even the USA and UK are no exceptions. In India too, it is believed that Bohra Muslims continue to practise FGM.

The age for FGM is variable. It can be anywhere between two and 35 years. However, these procedures are carried out mostly in the age group of four to 10 years. And surprisingly, it is usually the mother



who arranges such surgeries.

It is unfortunate that these mutilating surgeries are undertaken by quacks or untrained paramedical staff, especially women. They have no clue about hygiene, sterilisation or anaesthesia. The instruments used are mostly improvised. Depending on the ingenuity of the self-proclaimed surgeons, they could range from kitchen or butchers' knives to tailors' scissors, garden tools, shaving blades and even sharp-edged glasses. In some countries like Egypt, Yemen, Mauritania, Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, etc, it has been medicalised so as to reduce the chances of complications.

The practice has been so alarming that the World Health Organisation classified mutilation into various grades. It grouped FGM into four types. It starts with the mildest form called Type one that includes cutting the prepuce which is the hood of the clitoris. The most virulent type called Type three includes cutting out the whole clitoris, the inner folds (labia minora) and a part of the outer folds at the vaginal opening which are then stitched leaving behind a very small opening that permits the passage of only urine and menstrual blood. Type two is in between Type one and Type three.

There is yet another group called

Type four. This includes piercing/giving cuts on the clitoris and inner folds, and then stretching them. Burning the clitoris/inner and/or outer folds with chemicals, putting chemicals and herbs inside the vagina which desensitise vaginal walls, are also included in this group.

THE EVIL PRACTICE

This is the most evil practice one could ever come across and leaves permanent scars on the psyche and body of the affected woman. FGM is a severe psychological trauma at the time of surgery and subsequently too. It is highly against the dignity and sexual rights of a woman. A female may develop a low body image and a poor self-esteem. The procedure itself is painful.

It predisposes a female to lifelong infections in the urinary tract and reproductive organs. FGM may also come in the way of conception and delivery. A woman's sexual urge, arousability and sexual performance may adversely get affected. The latter may lead to problems in marital relationships too. It will do us good to know that such practices though lessening with the opening up of society and equality of genders, still persist. Mobilisation of public opinion at the right forums would go a long way to root out this evil.

