



Female Genital Mutilation in Egypt

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ABSTRACT

Female Genital Mutilation is widely practiced in Egypt as well as in big sections of the African continent. The tradition of mutilation of the female genital areas has been practiced over the course of many years in the country and has been attributed to being promoted by the Islamic religion in Egypt. The Islamic religion is the most widely practiced religion within Egypt and therefore is linked to being the main reason why the country possesses one of the highest prevalence rates of the practice within Africa, according to many surveys performed by many leading agencies and nongovernmental organizations that advocate for the abolition of the practice within the country. FGM as a social health concern has been realized as not possessing any health benefits for the women and young girls who are taken through the practice.

Keywords: Female genital mutilation, Egypt, Islamic religion, culture

INTRODUCTION

The term FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) is a phrase that has been presented to reference any form of the procedure that is performed on the genital areas of young girls and women that involves the removal of part or whole areas of the genitalia. The practice of FGM has been identified as being performed in many regions all across the world. The practice is; however, deeply rooted in the African continent and is heavily prevalent mostly in the countries that have a strong connection to the Islamic religion.

According to several reports that have been published by the World Health Organization (WHO), it has been indicated that millions of young girls and women have had the practice performed on them. It is estimated that close to 140 million of these young girls and women today live with the undesired consequences of the practice.

The practice is mostly reported to be highly prevalent in Africa, as well as some countries in the Middle East and some of the Asian countries. Focusing on Africa, the reports indicate that the practice has been

performed on close to 92 million girls who are 10 years old and above. In Egypt alone it was estimated that close to 92% of the women in the country had undergone the ritual of FGM.

Below is a diagrammatic representation of the prevalence rates of countries practicing FGM in Egypt.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to identify if the practice of FGM is rooted in Egypt as a cultural practice or as a religious practice. In the course of the study the paper will analyze the extents to which religion has played a role in bolstering the practice of FGM in Egypt.

METHODS

The study incorporated the use of extensive research on the topics of FGM using studies found in libraries, mainly the e-libraries. The reason as to why the study of FGM in Egypt was chosen as the case study is attributed to the high prevalence rate of FGM within the Islamic Nation of Egypt. The sources of

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information for the purposes of the research were mainly secondary sources such as peer reviewed journal articles that have been published in e-learning libraries, scholarly literature and articles. These

source materials were derived from public libraries, online databases such as Proquest, Ebscohost and Emerald research libraries.

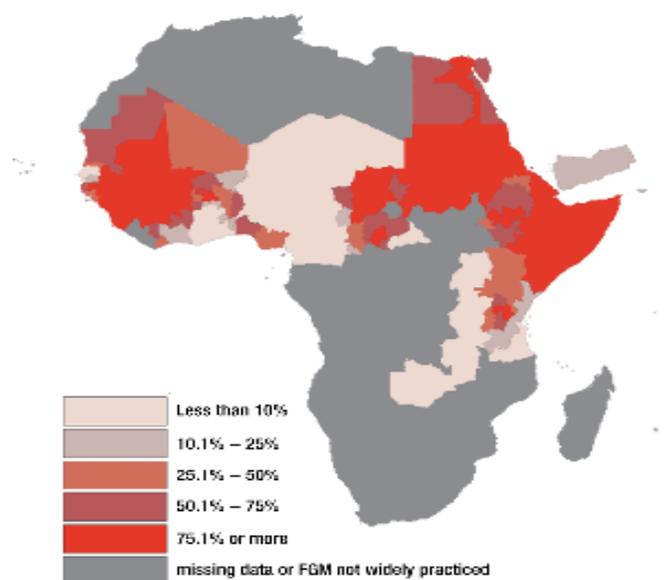


Figure 1 Prevalence Rate of FGM in Africa

Source 1: WHO (2013): MICS, DHS and other national surveys, 1997-2006. Map developed by UNICEF, 2007

A thorough examination of the secondary material to be used for purposes of the research was performed. Qualitative research analysis was adopted when reviewing the material to be used within the study to ensure that it was related to the topic of discussion which pertains to the nature and implications of FGM in Egypt and the relation it has to human rights violations.

RESULTS

The practice of FGM in Egypt has come to be regarded as a socially acceptable practice within the country and is regarded as an important factor in the lives of many Egyptians. These societies who perform the practice tend to view the practice as a religious obligation mainly related to the Islamic religion, which is the most prevalent religion in the country of Egypt¹. In the Islamic culture, circumcision amongst the male gender is regarded as a compulsory practice amongst all males, which can therefore be linked to

the possibility as to why the culture of FGM is highly prevalent in the Islamic culture.

Religious leaders who advocate for the prevalence of FGM have attested that FGM is a practice that the religion claims is a right for the women. They pursue that for a woman to not be excised, that she is not pure and clean in the eyes of God. However, the question of FGM being a religious practice is put into doubt as there is no express mention within the Koran of the practice of excision on the woman being a compulsory practice that ought to be performed. Also, not all Islamic communities perform this practice across the world. Another factor that puts this into doubt is that there are other communities who perform the practice and do not practice Islam¹. In Egypt furthermore, researchers and other historians have claimed that the practice can be traced to the times of the ancient Egyptians, particularly during the era of the Pharaohs.

There are four types of FGM that are mainly practiced globally today with Type II being the most prevalent

type of FGM witnessed and practiced in Egypt. A diagrammatic representation is indicated below:

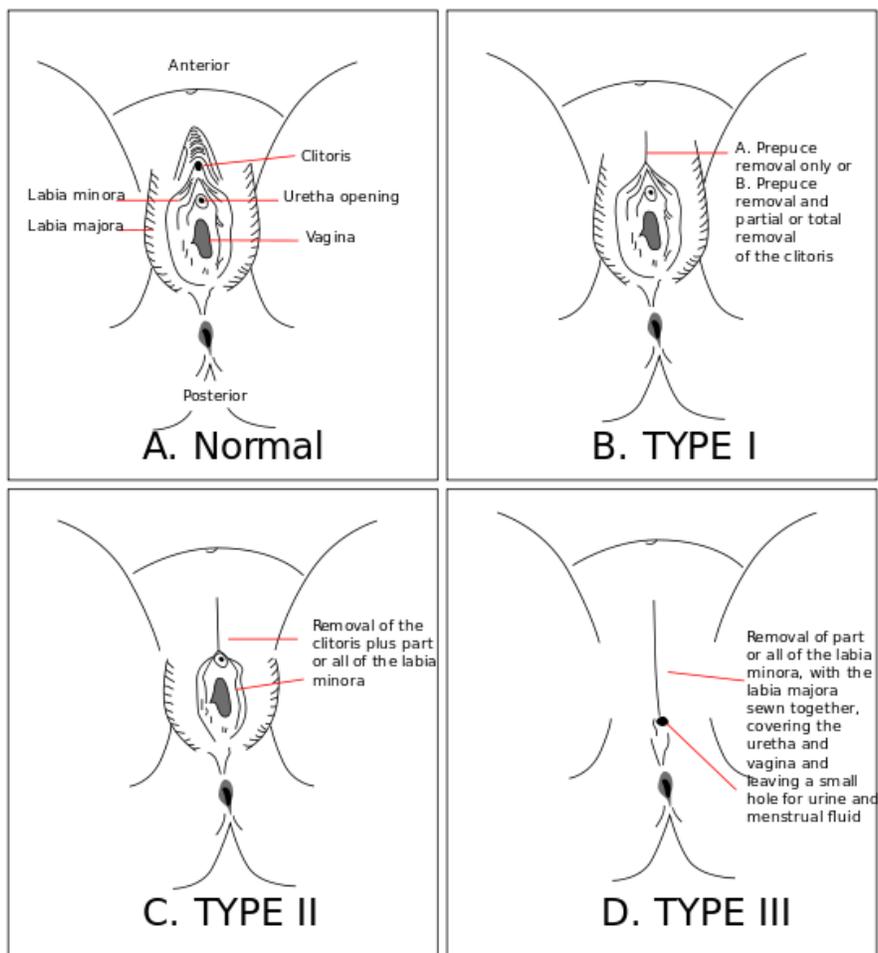


Figure 2 Types of Female Genital Mutilation

Source 2: ACCM (UK), (2008)

Therefore the argument that the practice of FGM in Egypt is practiced amongst those of the Islamic culture is misleading. This is because it has been witnessed that a number of Christian faithful in the country also practice the culture of FGM. It can therefore be presented that the culture of FGM is not only tied to the Islamic religion and may not be a religious issue, but rather a cultural tradition. Evidence is raised by the fact that it has no place in religion, but instead in culture because from a global

scale other religious peoples do not observe the practice on a wide scale as is done in Egypt.

Research on the issue of FGM in Egypt points out that the practice has roots in being (i) an act of obedience or honour to the teachings of religion, (ii) ensuring that improper sexual conduct amongst the females is kept at a minimum, (iii) for societal approval, and (iv) increasing the sexual satisfaction of the males¹.

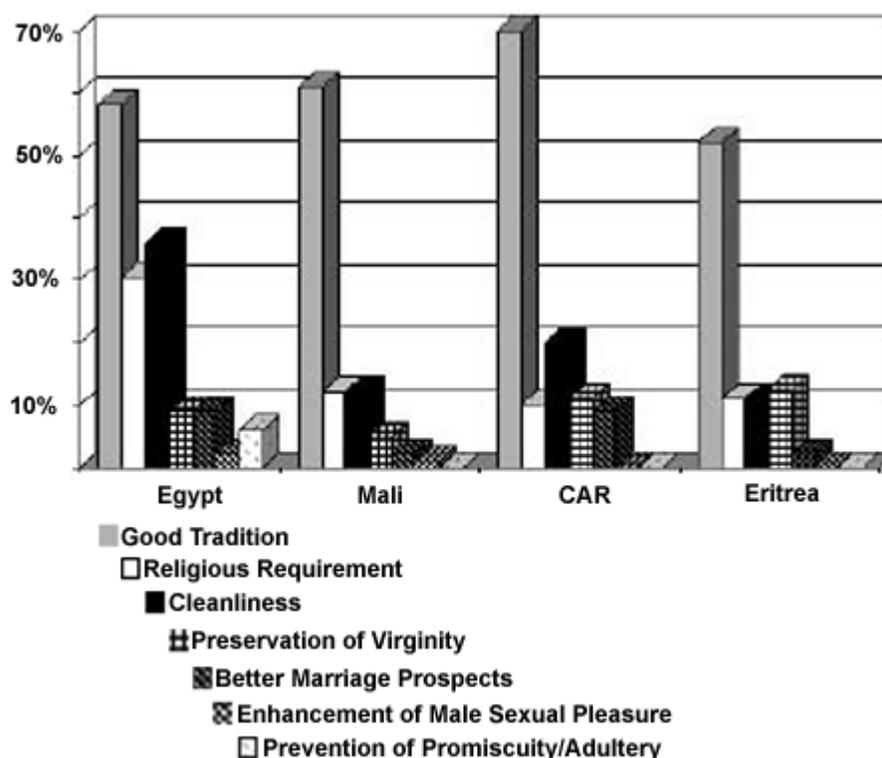


Figure 3 Reasons for FGM by Country

Source 3 Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH)

In Egypt as a result of pressure from the international community and other agencies, the country adopted a strategy in which they made it legal for the practice to be performed within the confines of the health care system¹. This meant that doctors and other health care providers could perform the practice of FGM on the women and the young girls.

This was considered highly unethical by the international community. The reason was that the community viewed the move as an attempt by the government to avoid banning the practice only by offering safe performance of the practice on the victims of FGM. The move by the community to have the practice banned was because the practice was identified as having negative consequences on the women and girls.

The practice, which is considered as being unnecessary medically, as well as from a health perspective, subjects the victims to physical pain, as

well as psychological torture as they suffer from physical pain, possible infections and scarring. As a result of this human rights abuse many governments have banned the practice of FGM and have put stiff penalties into place for those who perform the practice of FGM¹.

The WHO in 1979 disapproved of the move by countries such as Egypt to medically perform FGM¹, as Egypt did as it undermined the banning of the practice that had been banned by ten United Nation Organizations in 2008¹. Many governments as a result undertook to ban the practice as well, and to include an education program for medical practitioners¹.

CONCLUSION

FGM is not discriminative when it comes to the level of education, social standing or class or religious group. The practice of FGM is not part of a religious background, as it has not been held within the Koran

that the practice be performed, but the practice is part of a cultural tradition. According to the Convention of the Rights of the Child held in 1989, the practice of FGM merely violates the rights of the child and lowers the right of the child to enjoy the necessary rights of attaining the highest possible standards of health¹.

Despite the banning of the practice within countries, the eradication of FGM is still a problem as the practice merely gets hidden from the eyes of the public and continues quietly. Therefore, laws alone cannot help eradicate the practice which is viewed by many who practice it as a religious or traditional practice, even though education and awareness

programs are heavily advocated to help eradicate the practice in eventuality².

The practice of FGM and the upholding of traditions have been questioned by the international community; however, it also raises the question as to the validity of the rights of the international community to intervene in the affairs of those who practice them. It is, however, proposed that traditions are reasonable and admissible only if they are in line with the values taught within religions and other documents that help define local morality. As a result, the practice of FGM is not one with a religious backing and therefore should not be considered as such.

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