

Female Circumcision in Egypt.



Female circumcision also called female genital mutilation (FGM) is an ancient practice performed in some culture including Egypt.^[1] The history of its performance had preceded the Abrahamic religions.^[2] In such procedure, the external genitalia of females are partially or totally removed as well as labial fusion known as infibulation.^[3,4] The clitoris and labia minora are the most common organs to be partially or completely excised in the procedure.^[4] Therefore, it deprives the female from structures essential for healthy sexual life, particularly the clitoris which is excised in all traditional procedures.^[5] Clitoris is an erectile organ, extremely sensitive to touch and supplied by the ilioinguinal and dorsal nerves of the clitoris. Its appropriate stimulation with the external genitalia results in a climax of pleasurable sensation; and can trigger orgasm.^[6,7] Its removal leads to impairment of the sexual drive.^[7] Therefore, practice of female circumcision is not considered to be only an issue for the women, but also concerns men and the whole families.^[8] Unlike the male circumcision that carries debates about its importance, no study has clarified any health benefit after female circumcision.^[9]

Circumcision is usually performed for cultural, social or religious reasons.^[10] According to the traditional beliefs and conceptions, it should be conducted to girls before puberty aiming to prepare them to enter the womanhood and be ready to marry. The misconception is that removal of such parts excised in circumcision decreases the sexual desire of females, hence reducing the chance of extramarital relations and consequently persevering woman pride and her family honor. This act is motivated by both men and women.^[11]

On the other hand, it carries many complications; especially it is mostly performed by midwives or paramedical persons who mostly ignore the anatomy of this important region. It is carried out using razor blades and mostly without anesthesia. The dangers include hemorrhage, infections, sepsis, adhesions,

psychological troubles as well as decrease of the sensitivity of the female genitalia towards the sexual act.^[12] The subsequent labial adhesions may prevent the normal sexual contact, resulting in infertility. Also, the hemorrhage may lead to loss of the girl life.^[2]

It is the mission of the health education and physicians to highlight the importance of the intact external genitalia for normal life; and the sexual desire doesn't arise from the removed parts but it is a complex interaction of central and peripheral nervous systems, affected by psychological and physical factors.^[6] Instead, it compromises woman's health and negates her normal sexuality. Female circumcision must be confined only to such cases of congenital hypertrophy of the clitoris or labia minora; and done by physicians in hospitals. Also, religious men should take their role in deleting this bad practice from the mind of their fellows; and clarify its truth that it doesn't relate to the religion.

Although it is prohibited by law in Egypt, it is still widely practiced, especially in rural areas.^[13] Therefore, until the conceptions of general populations have been changed, it is recommended to admit cases seeking the circumcision at hospitals to be performed by the medical staff. It is also recommended that the procedure may involve only slight trimming the labia minora, without cutting the clitoris. Such medicalization of female circumcision should be taken into consideration if the act is inevitable. This may be an alternative acceptable by general publications in settings where abandonment of the circumcision practice is not immediately attained.^[14] This should be done in parallel with efforts aiming to dispel the myths about this custom for its eradication through widespread health and religious education programs.

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