

Forum: Special Committee on Children
Issue: Female Genital Mutilation
Specialist Chair: Sadhbh O'Mahony

Introduction

Female Genital Mutilation¹ includes surgical procedures performed on the female genitalia which can lead to severe health risks on the female. These procedures have no health benefits on women and lead to heavy bleeding, problems urinating and increased new born mortality rates. Female genital mutilation is mostly performed on girls up to the age of 15 in over 30 countries including countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

Definition of Key Terms

1. **Female Genital Mutilation:** The practice, traditional in some cultures, of partially or totally removing the external genitalia of girls and young women for non-medical reasons
2. **Infibulation:** The practice of excising the clitoris and labia of a girl or woman and stitching together the edges of the vulva to prevent sexual intercourse
3. **Cultural Relativism:** the idea that a person's beliefs, values, and practices should be understood based on that person's own culture, rather than be judged against the criteria of another
4. **Gender Inequality:** Legal, social and cultural situation in which sex and/or gender determine different rights and dignity for women and men, which are reflected in their unequal access to or enjoyment of rights, as well as the assumption of stereotyped social and cultural roles
5. **Social Exclusion:** Is the social disadvantage and relegation to the fringe of society
6. **Clitoridectomy:** The surgical removal, reduction, or partial removal of the clitoris

Background Information

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is an ancient practice dating back some 2,000 years to ancient Egypt and, although not explicitly mentioned is alluded to in the bible as a practice performed on Egyptian slaves. The practice of FGM is deeply embedded in certain communities and based on a range of motives, although the main reason relates to ensuring a woman is pure and chaste in preparation for marriage.

Major Organizations Involved

World Health Organisation (WHO)

In 2008, the World Health Assembly passed resolution WHA61.16 on the elimination of FGM, emphasizing the need for concerted action in all sectors - health, education, finance, justice and women's affairs.

WHO efforts to eliminate female genital mutilation focus on:

- strengthening the health sector response: guidelines, tools, training and policy to ensure that health professionals can provide medical care and counselling to girls and women living with FGM;
- building evidence: generating knowledge about the causes and consequences of the practice, including why health care professionals carry out procedures, how to eliminate it, and how to care for those who have experienced FGM;
- increasing advocacy: developing publications and advocacy tools for international, regional and local efforts to end FGM within a generation

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) & United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

In 2007, UNFPA and UNICEF initiated the Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting to accelerate the abandonment of the practice and currently leads the largest global program to accelerate the abandonment of FGM. The program currently focuses on 17 African countries and also supports regional and global initiatives.

The Global Alliance against FGM

The Global Alliance against FGM acts as an umbrella organization for NGOs on the field. The organisation collaborates with concerned United Nations Agencies, Non-governmental organizations, civil society, private sector and donors. It works to raise awareness through cultural events, minimise isolation and strengthen local action, bring FGM communities together and end traditional violence against women

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)

UNESCO held a conference in 2015 with the title: "Re-Thinking Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in 2015 and beyond", making the empowerment of girls through education a key priority globally. The organisation carries out a number of projects to help girls in LEDCs access education.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- 1997, WHO issues a joint statement against the practice of FGM together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).
- General Assembly resolution on 'Intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilations', 20th December 2012
- General Assembly resolution on 'The girl child', 18th December 2013 (A/68/146)
- General Assembly resolution on 'Intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilations', 18th December 2014 (A/69/50)

Possible Solutions

- Include UNESCO into the resolution to come up with education programmes in countries which practise FGM to empower women and girls
- Establish rehabilitation centres for girls and their families who have been affected by FGM to overcome any trauma in accordance with the situation
- Set up educational workshops and programmes targeted at men and boys to educate them on their role in tackling the issue – overseen by UNESCO

- Strengthen advocacy and awareness-raising programmes throughout member nations and actively encourage boys and girls to help develop programmes which eliminate traditional harmful practises
- Develop healthcare centres with fully qualified doctors and nurses who have the ability of treating survivors of FGM

Bibliography

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