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Female Genital Mutilation: Why Such Practices?

Difficult to eradicate

One of the Africa's most horrific traditions persists in the 21st century: "purification", "female circumcision" or, more correctly named female genital mutilation (FGM). About 2 million African girls are mutilated annually, and 135 million women live with the mutilation. The age to be done varies between 2 to 12 years old, and an uncut girl will be regarded by the community as "impure", facing many taboos and social rejection. The dishonored family could not marry her without the "rite of passage" from childhood to adulthood (so that she makes "good marriage material"). In few cases, this is done by doctors, and the midwives/practitioners do it in highly unhygienic conditions, which expose the girls to pain, infections, continuous hemorrhage and on long-term to urinary and reproductive tract infections, caused by obstructed flow of urine and menstrual blood, various forms of scarring and sterility. Shock due to pain, and severe bleeding or infections kill 3,000 girls each year. 1-2 % of the African babies die due to FGM-linked complications. About 75 % of the circumcised Egyptian girls are cut by medical personnel (doctors and nurses) who receive \$8.85-88.50 for each operation. In Egypt, girls die due to a wrong dose of anesthesia or from hemorrhage. Mutilation is not a religious demand. Many associate this practice with Islam, but that's wrong. This African custom predates the Islam appearance (not to mention spread in Africa), and if African Muslims practice it, it's due to the African religious syncretism: they combine Islam with local traditions like they do with Christianity, too. And African Christians do practice the mutilation, too, like the Ethiopians. In June 2007, Egypt's Grand Mufti, official arbiter of Islamic law stated that FGM was forbidden by Islam. The practice rather originated in Egypt, during the Pharaohs' time was spread across Africa with the Arab slave traders. In the Arab world, the FGM is rare, but it is widespread, besides Egypt, in Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia and a large area of western/central Africa. It is a tradition meant to keep virginity, ensure marriage and keep under control sexuality, turning women into child-making and working machines, devoid of sexual pleasure, in societies in which the man controls women's sexuality (virginity, morality and marriage). During colonial times, in some regions, like Kenya, the FGM was used as a form of resistance against the colonial powers. Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan make 75 % of the cases. In Djibouti and Somalia, 98 % of the girls are mutilated, in Egypt up to 95 %. The practice goes from clitoridotomy (removal or splitting of the clitoris hood) and clitoris removal (clitoridectomy) (in western and central Africa) to infibulation (Pharaonic circumcision), partial or total removal of the female external genitalia and suture of the vaginal opening. (15 %, practiced in northern Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, eastern Ethiopia). The sewing of the remaining skin of labia minora, harboring sweat glands, leads to a buildup of sweat and urine, urinary infection, septicemia, hemorrhaging and cyst formation. The normal anatomy of the genitalia is replaced by a wall of flesh from the pubis down to the anus, with a minute opening where vulva was permitting the passage of urine and menstrual blood. To have sexual intercourse, the husband has to use a knife on the wedding night to enlarge the opening, and during each childbirth, the infibulation must be opened completely and restored afterwards. This practice is banned in all western countries (were African immigrants arrive) and also in many African countries. In Senegal, this is forbidden since 1999, but this has just spurred the practice. Personally, I met even Senegalese people with a PhD degree approving the practice, motivating that this way, little girls are safe from rape ... In many countries legislation is not reinforced, like in Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Ivory Coast, Djibouti, Guinea, Tanzania, Togo. The death of a 11-year-old Egyptian girl in 2007 pushed the government to prohibit the custom, but this

just could push the practice underground as many Egyptians consider the FGM as a way to protect the girls' chastity. "If a girl is not purified, she will just go hook up with men. This protects women's honor. Otherwise, it will become just like America here and girls will go with guys. Those who say it doesn't happen are lying 100 %. There is not one person here not circumcised, and it will continue", a 16-year-old secondary school Egyptian girl student commented. "No one can get married without it," said another one.