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- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)-

What is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)?

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), a deeply rooted cultural practice, continues to be a significant global concern due to its profound physical, psychological, and social implications for women and girls. This practice involves the partial or total removal of external female genitalia for non-medical reasons. Despite international efforts to eradicate FGM, it persists in various parts of the world due to cultural, economic, and historical factors.

Where is FGM mostly practiced?

FGM is prevalent in multiple regions, including parts of Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and some immigrant communities in Western countries. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that over 200 million girls and women have undergone FGM. However, FGM is not exclusive to specific religions or ethnicities; it is practiced among Muslims, Christians, and indigenous communities alike.

Motivations Behind FGM

The motivations behind FGM are intricate and often interwoven with cultural, social, and economic factors. While the practice varies among communities, several common themes emerge:

Cultural Tradition

FGM is often rooted in cultural and traditional beliefs, signifying purity, modesty, and initiation into womanhood. It is viewed as a rite of passage and a way to ensure social acceptance and marriageability.

Perceived Health Benefit

In some communities, FGM is believed to have health benefits, such as improved hygiene, reduced promiscuity, and prevention of certain illnesses. These beliefs are often passed down through generations.

Social Pressure and Conformity

Societal norms and pressures compel families to adhere to FGM to ensure their daughters' social integration and marriage prospects. Failure to comply can lead to exclusion and stigma.

Gender Inequality

FGM is deeply linked to gender inequality, perpetuating the idea of control over women's bodies and sexuality. It is often driven by patriarchal norms and the desire to maintain control over women's reproductive choices.

Harmful Consequences

The consequences of FGM are extensive, ranging from immediate health risks to long-term physical, psychological, and social impacts:

Physical Health

Immediate risks include severe pain, bleeding, infections, and even death during the procedure. Long-term effects can involve chronic pain, urinary problems, menstruation complications, and difficulties during childbirth.

Psychological

FGM can cause psychological trauma, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The violation of bodily integrity and the associated pain can lead to a lifelong struggle with mental health.

Sexual Health and Pleasure

FGM often leads to reduced sexual pleasure and can cause pain during intercourse, impacting women's sexual well-being and relationships.

Social Isolation and Stigma

FGM can contribute to social isolation and stigma, as women who have not undergone the procedure may be ostracized or considered impure within their communities.

Types of FGM:

FGM encompasses various procedures, categorized into four main types by the World Health Organization:

Type 1 - Clitoridectomy

Partial or total removal of the clitoral glans (the visible part of the clitoris).

Type 2 - Excision

Partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora (inner vaginal lips), with or without the labia majora (outer vaginal lips).

Type 3 - Infibulation

Narrowing of the vaginal opening by creating a covering seal, often achieved by cutting and repositioning the labia minora and/or majora.

Type 4 - Other

This category includes all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical reasons, such as pricking, piercing, or incising.

Awareness of FGM

Global efforts to eliminate FGM have gained momentum, with numerous international organizations, governments, and grassroots movements working tirelessly to eradicate this practice. Legislation and awareness campaigns have been instrumental in challenging deeply ingrained norms and raising awareness about the physical and psychological consequences of FGM.

Is it still practised today?

Sadly, Female Genital Mutilation is still practiced today with far-reaching consequences for the physical and emotional well-being of millions of girls and women. The only way to stop this from happening is to address the underlying cultural, social, and economic factors that sustain it and by educating the people on the harms and difficulties females face because of it.

By understanding the reasons behind FGM, acknowledging its harms, and supporting community-driven change, we can work together towards a world where every girl and woman can live free from the physical and psychological burdens of this harmful practice.

FGM is Illegal in UK

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is illegal in the United Kingdom under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003.

The Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 criminalises various offenses related to FGM, including performing FGM, aiding, abetting, taking girls abroad for the purpose of FGM and persuading anyone to take any part in this procedure.

Consequences of performing or aiding in performing FGM

Anyone found guilty of performing or aiding in performing FGM can face a maximum penalty of up to 14 years in prison, a fine, or both. This includes individuals who arrange for a girl to be taken abroad for FGM.

The UK law has an extra-territorial jurisdiction, meaning that even if FGM is performed outside the UK, those responsible can be prosecuted under UK law if they are UK nationals or residents.

In 2015, the law was amended to include a duty for healthcare professionals, social workers, and teachers to report cases of FGM in girls under 18 to the police. This legal requirement is aimed at safeguarding girls at risk and ensuring that cases are promptly investigated.

The law also allows for FGM Protection Orders, which can be obtained through the family court to protect individuals at risk of FGM. These orders can impose restrictions or requirements on individuals to prevent FGM from occurring.

The UK government, along with various organizations, works to raise awareness about FGM, provide support to survivors, and prevent the practice through education and outreach.

The aim is to change social norms and attitudes that perpetuate FGM and to ensure the safety and well-being of girls and women.